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SUMMER, 1962 VOLUME XXIX, NUMBER 3

CONTENTS

HUMANITIS—A FARCE, Saul Bellow 327
THE MODERN AS VISION OF A WHOLE SITUATION, Stephen Spender 350
SIX POEMS, Robert Lowell 366
SONS, LOVERS AND MOTHERS, Alfred Kazin 373
THE END OF ANTI-COMMUNISM, Norman Birnbaum 386
HEMINGWAY IN KETCHUM, Leslie Fiedler 395
THE BOURGEOIS POET, Karl Shapiro 406
ART CHRONICLE, Robert Goldwater 416
DUPES OF THE ART FILM, Penelope Gilliatt 421
AMERICA REVISITED, John Henry Raleigh 425
BOOKS
VIRTUOSITY REWARDED, Dwight Macdonald 437
AIMEZ-VOUS AMERICA?, Lewis Coser 443
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST, Paul Goodman 448
A RAID ON THE INARTICULATE, John Hollander 451
THE THEATRE AND THE "ABSURD," Lionel Abel 454
DEMONS AND DREAMS, Susan Sontag 460
PAT HOBBY RIDES AGAIN, Wilson Pollock 464
FICTION CHRONICLE, Frank Kermode 466
CORRESPONDENCE 477

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SAUL BELLOW's new play, **Humanitis—A Farce,** which PR is pleased to publish in part in this issue, is scheduled for Broadway production by Roger Stevens this fall.

ALFRED KAZIN's piece on Lawrence will be the introduction to a new edition of **Sons and Lovers,** to be published by Modern Library this fall.

NORMAN BIRNBAUM, an editor of **The New Left Review,** teaches sociology at Oxford. He is now in this country, and on Harvard Summer School's faculty.

PENELOPE GILLIAT is **The London Observer's** movie critic.

PAUL GOODMAN will have a collection of his poetry, **The Lordly Hudson,** published in the fall by Macmillan.

SUSAN SONTAG is a young writer who teaches at Barnard College and whose first novel will be published shortly.

WILSON POLLOCK is appearing in PR for the first time. He has written for **The New Republic** and is presently at work on a novel.

FRANK KERMODE's collection of essays, **Puzzles and Epiphanies,** will be published in the fall by Chilmark Press.

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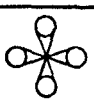

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Saul Bellow

SCENES FROM
HUMANITIS—A FARCE

ACT I

SCENE 1

WINKLEMAN *on the analyst's couch is a stout worldly lawyer in his fifties who holds his fedora on his belly.*

WINKLEMAN: Yeah, all right, so I'm still living with my old mother.

PSYCHIATRIST: And she is how old?

WINKLEMAN: Eighty-six.

PSYCHIATRIST: Ah.

WINKLEMAN: But I didn't come to you for treatment, doc. I'm here to consult you about somebody else, my client, Bummidge.

PSYCHIATRIST: As you said, the famous comedian, Bummidge. Odd, I never thought about him as a person with problems—just a figure, like Bert Lahr or the Marx Brothers.

WINKLEMAN: I'm not only his lawyer, but his cousin.

PSYCHIATRIST: He's very funny.

WINKLEMAN: He used to be—he used to be. Now he's very serious.

PSYCHIATRIST: Let me get it straight. *You* came because he lost his comic touch? Why doesn't he come?

WINKLEMAN: He never would. He's getting psychiatric help, all right, but from himself. He writes his own scripts, makes his own decisions, does everything for himself.

PSYCHIATRIST: Everything?

WINKLEMAN: I know what you mean . . . He also lies to his lawyer. Doctor, some people are self-destructive—okay. But he's also destroying a fortune of money. Millions. One single gag of his is worth twenty-five—fifty grand. If he makes a face, I can sell it for a spot on TV. He isn't doing any business. And you say psychiatry. Psychiatry is just

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the trouble. But his own kind of psychiatry. He looks down on everybody, including highbrows, but he always believed himself the brainiest there is. The way people keep booze hidden? He's kept books. People *mustn't know* he was studying. He hid them in the clothes hamper in the toilet—and read. Freud. Plato. Pascal. Kierkegaard. He evolved his own type of therapy.

PSYCHIATRIST: What is it, can you tell me?

WINKLEMAN: He's acting out his whole life. Somebody comes in, like the dry-cleaner, a United Parcel man, the exterminator—anybody. And they start to act. He coaches 'em.

PSYCHIATRIST: Extraordinary. And why do they . . . ?

WINKLEMAN: He's a star. They think he'll do something for them. They're flattered. He has a lunatic charm. And he bribes . . . bribes like crazy.

PSYCHIATRIST: With actual money?

WINKLEMAN: Whatever it takes. Shoes, neckties, automobiles, candy, bananas. When we were kids he used to give me licorice to go to the toilet with him. He can't stand to be alone. Bribes to his kids, to his wife, his mistresses. (*Tries to sit*)

PSYCHIATRIST: No, lie there, Mr. Winkleman. I think better that way.

WINKLEMAN: (*Hangs his fedora on his foot and lies back*) To act out his life with him he prefers people with a Freudian background. He lives in a building full of analysts, and he pays the elevator man and the doorman to procure the oldest patients. Some have become attached to him.

PSYCHIATRIST: And what's his object?

WINKLEMAN: Insight . . . And he's offering half a million bucks to any medical school which will accept his system. For a chair.

PSYCHIATRIST: Five hundred thousand? Any takers?

WINKLEMAN: Not yet. But the Eastern Psychiatric something is meeting at the Waldorf, and Bummidge is appearing for fifteen minutes on closed circuit television with a little lecture and demonstration of his method.

PSYCHIATRIST: Ha! Ha!

WINKLEMAN: Are you coughing, or scoffing. He bribed somebody on the program committee—leave it to him. Meanwhile, his children are both on the outs with him. His wife—they don't live together. His girl friend, a silly whore. You'd pick her up in any hotel lobby for a quick push. Buy her a fifth of gin, she'd be happy. Not Bummidge. He does everything big. She has an apartment, car, furs, and she's aiming to marry him.

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PSYCHIATRIST: Does he have that kind of money?

WINKLEMAN: (*Sitting*) Who knows? Not even me. The way I figure, he must be practically ruined already.

PSYCHIATRIST: Does he have the five hundred thousand?

WINKLEMAN: I can't tell. He's such a big shot. I could get him a contract worth a million tomorrow, if he'd say yes.

PSYCHIATRIST: I wish I could see his system at work. Is it funny? He's a great comic. I laughed myself sick at his last movie. *The Handler* . . . He.

WINKLEMAN: Oh, you're a fan? Well, there's nothing funny about him to *his* mind when he does his action-therapy. I'll show you. He was reconstructing the other day . . . His father used to own a candy store in Williamsburg. Took bets, on the side. They lived behind the store. Now, Bummidge, trying to recapture certain traumas of his puberty. Now, he's fingering his sister's underwear in the dresser, and she catches him. He acts just like a twelve-year-old. Voice cracking. What a repulsive kid he was. He had green pimples, his ears stank, his teeth were foul. He used to come to our house to masturbate. There wasn't enough privacy at his . . . Anyway, he has a scene. He gets Imogen, his secretary to play his sister . . .

PSYCHIATRIST: The secretary?

WINKLEMAN: What do you think, I came to waste time about trifles? Imogen, the secretary does stenotyping. A sweet kid. He keeps a bodyguard, too. In the old days, that meant class.

PSYCHIATRIST: Fascinating. Yes? Well, show me.

WINKLEMAN: You must grab me, as a sister would. An older sister. Pretty mean, my cousin Madge. Yelling, "Ma, look what I caught him doing. Look what he's doing."

PSYCHIATRIST: (*Clutching* WINKLEMAN) "Ma, look what I caught him doing. Look what he's doing."

WINKLEMAN: Excuse me, Doctor. (*He steps on his foot, heavily*)

PSYCHIATRIST: Ow! Yes, I see. You did that rather hard. Yes, yes, I see. (*Takes off his shoe and sock, and rubs the injured place*)

WINKLEMAN: Sorry, Doc. Now, I'm Bummidge, remember. "Oh, you lousy sibling bitch. It's a trauma. It's a trauma." (*Staggers*)—Then, Doctor, he sits down. He recaptures the emotions. He fits them into a general framework. He thinks, and thinks, and talks and talks, and the girl takes it all down, and types it in triplicate, in leather binders.

PSYCHIATRIST: Yes. My, my. Quite elaborate, eh. I'd like to see that material.

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WINKLEMAN: It's in a vault. Now tell me—I've given a fair account. Is he nuts?

PSYCHIATRIST: I'd have to examine him, of course. Is someone thinking of committing him?

WINKLEMAN: It's been suggested. By his son. And some of the analysts in the building are sore at him for fooling with their patients. But why shouldn't a famous comedian be a little nutty? Anyway, if we put him away, that'd be the end of his earning.

PSYCHIATRIST: I hope you don't expect me to give a professional opinion, just like that.

WINKLEMAN: I thought you might have a tip or two on how to handle him. Now, for instance, he wants to borrow my mother for his therapy. His mother was my mother's sister . . .

PSYCHIATRIST: Is that a problem?

WINKLEMAN: We're flying her back from Hawaii. In a wheelchair. She's eighty-six.

PSYCHIATRIST: You sound a little jealous.

WINKLEMAN: Not so. Of course, I want to win. All my life, I've been confused by his master-minding. But I come out on top, because I make the buck. Let him be eccentric. He can't come up with something I can't sell. I don't care what. How wild his inspirations. I can make profit on them. About fifteen years ago he started painting pictures. Vile! So what! I peddled them for plenty. If he wanted to pick his nose in Saks window I could make a deal. If he dies before me, I'll sell cousin Bummy bit by bit, for relics. But on this psychiatric kick I can't handle him. Not yet. The question is how to rehabilitate him as a money maker. That's what concerns me, his daughter, his son, his family—even that stupid broad of his.

PSYCHIATRIST: You could do with my professional services, yourself.

WINKLEMAN: Not unless I could make a profit. Do you need legal work?

PSYCHIATRIST: Couldn't possibly make a deal with you.

WINKLEMAN: I'd win. I can tell. It's like an instinct with me.

PSYCHIATRIST: That scene in *The Handler* when Bummidge doesn't get out of the ring fast enough and he squats in the corner behind his fighter. Ha, ha!

WINKLEMAN: Yeah—he's a funny fellow.

PSYCHIATRIST: And with the towel, when he wipes the champ's face. (*Business with his handkerchief*)

WINKLEMAN: No, it wasn't like that. It was like this. (*Wipes the psychiatrist's face with the handkerchief*)

PSYCHIATRIST: Not at all. It was this way. (*Works on* WINKLEMAN'S

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face) In the ears. (*They struggle over the handkerchief as the lights go off*)

ACT I

from SCENE II

Bummidge's apartment on Central Park South. Bummidge is onstage. When he is not funny, he seems somewhat severe, a rather imposing man: half ravaged, half dignified. He is dressed in ski pajamas and a bathrobe, soft lounging shoes, rather elegant; he is capable of going wild on short notice.

Enter IMOGEN *and* SHELDON, *the bodyguard.* SHELDON *is a former Big Ten football star who attached himself to* BUMMIDGE. IMOGEN, *his secretary, is carrying a sandwich on a plate—*BUMMIDGE'S *breakfast.*

BUMMIDGE: Finally! Where have you been!

SHELDON: Just doing the errands you told me, boss. You said to return those shirts. Then I went to see about that hat they blocked wrong. Then I had to see about the cigars, like you said, in your vault. Then . . .

BUMMIDGE: All right. How did you get the cuffs of your pants so slopped up? Never mind. What about the people I'll need today? Where's Mott? What's in this sandwich? Take this in the kitchen and put some mustard on it. (SHELDON *takes the sandwich*) Wait. (BUMMIDGE *bites into it*) Mustard. (SHELDON *goes to the kitchen*) Ready, Imogen? (IMOGEN *sits at the stenotype machine*) Here we go—(BUMMIDGE *throws himself on the couch. Beside it there is a chair for the analyst.* BUMMIDGE *is patient and analyst by turns. As analyst, he wears a green eyeshade*) I dreamed of a fat man in a sweater, of a pig in bed with me. I dreamed I was in a swimming pool; I was standing on the stepladder. An old man floated by on his back, with rosy cheeks, and a long beard he had. (*Changing to the analyst's chair*) The material seems very mixed, Bummidge. The water might —mind it *might*—be amniotic fluid. The beard indicates a father figure. (*Lying on the couch again*) I tell you frankly, I'm fed up with these boring figures in my unconscious. Mother, father, breast, milk,

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birth, infancy—I'm tired, do you hear? tired of them all. Sick—Imogen, be sure you get this all down. It's a breakthrough.

IMOGEN: Mother, breast, birth . . . I'm right with you, Mr. Bummidge.

BUMMIDGE: (*As analyst*) You're sick *from* them, Mr. Bummidge. Of course. We know you are. If you weren't sick, things wouldn't be well with you. We are all sick. Man is a sick creature. (*On the couch again*) Why would my father-figure have a beard? Papa had only a moustache. During his last illness, he shaved it. His lip looked so naked. Pa. . . . Oh, Pa, your lip is so white. Age and weakness have come over you suddenly. Your strength is going. Age and weakness coming over my father. I drive up to the old candystore in my white Dusenberg. I'm a bigshot now, and there's my father counting out the *Daily Mirrors*. Papa, I'm sorry for you. (*As analyst*) Don't be deceived by your feelings, Mr. Bummidge. Maybe they aren't as compassionate as you think. Ambivalent? Part of you overjoyed? An old enemy is down. (*As patient*) You aren't serious? (*As analyst*) Dead serious. (*As patient*) I deny it. (*As analyst*) Come, Mr. Bummidge, you really don't allow anyone to tell you anything. (BUMMIDGE *lies on the couch, his eyes covered*)

IMOGEN: He's really giving it to himself today.

BUMMIDGE: (*With a profound groan*) Maybe . . . He was a hard man.

SHELDON *enters with the sandwich. He stands by the door.*

Couldn't stand the sight of me. He hit me because I had adenoids. Killjoy he was. So I showed him. I made a million at joy and pleasure. But was I ever gay? Really, was I gay and free? No, I had the lousy Pagliacci gangrene—laughing with catch in the throat. So maybe, when I saw the old man weakening I . . . (*He resumes the analyst's position, making a detour to take a bite of the sandwich and pat Sheldon on the shoulder*) I think that's correct as far as it goes. You are not a real sentimentalist, Mr. Bummidge. (BUMMIDGE *throws down the visor, and leaps on the couch*) Now I could have my mother all to myself—is that what you mean? And pity for poor Pop hides my criminal joy. The mother who used to bathe me in the little tin tub, and comb my hair with the thick comb and crack the lice with her fingernails. . . . Ah, how can a man live for so long ignorant of the unconscious? Just blind.

Enter MOTT. MOTT *is a rather unsavory man in his fifties. He was an early recruit to the* BUMMIDGE *system, and is his most reliable collaborator.* BUMMIDGE *keeps him on a salary.*

Ah, here's Louis Mott.

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MOTT: Greetings, all.

IMOGEN: Hi, there. (SHELDON *grunts*)

MOTT: What's the position?

BUMMIDGE: I'm in good form, Louie. My brain is like a sea of light. I see the events of my life like black fish, here, there, there, there.

MOTT: We must have been on the right track these last few days. What part of your life were we on.

IMOGEN: Eighteen to twenty-five.

BUMMIDGE: Yes. Here's what it was. I was playing burlesque. That's what we recaptured. (*He sings and dances*)

Oh, I went to school with Maggie Moiphy
And Maggie Moiphy went to school with me
I tried to get the best of Maggie Moiphy.
But the sonofagun, she got the best of me-e-e

SHELDON: You do that real well, boss.

MOTT: I wonder what it means?

BUMMIDGE: I'm thinking. Why burlesque? I was really afraid of the girls.

MOTT: Funny . . . that never was my problem.

SHELDON *and* IMOGEN *exchange looks.*

BUMMIDGE: Of course, I wanted to be a singer. It was my mother's ambition for me.

SHELDON: My mother wanted me to be in business for myself.

BUMMIDGE: There was a barber in the neighborhood. Da Torino. She sent me to him for lessons . . . I was fifteen, pimply, dressed in sweaters, breathing through my mouth. My hair parted in the middle. Never got enough to eat. Always on the run.

MOTT: How different I was at that age. Had a beautiful voice. Smooth personality. I belonged to the Purple Gang, in Detroit.

SHELDON: No kidding.

MOTT: I'm not kidding. My cousin was executioner for the mob. Another relative was bag man. I was an orphan, you see . . .

BUMMIDGE: I think we'd better work on this Da Torino episode. It's behind the barber shop. Torino always looks bushed. Leaning on the grand piano. The minestra is cooking. His wife is mopping the floor. I'm trying to sing. O-o-o-o-o. Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah. E-e-e-e-e. Now Sheldon, you're the barber's wife, you're mopping the floor.

Enter WINKLEMAN.

Hello, Winkie.

WINKLEMAN: What goes on?

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IMOGEN: This is one of Mr. Bummidge's therapeutic life episodes.

BUMMIDGE: (*Sings*) *La donna e mobile*
Bum bum il vento
Mutatashento.

WINKLEMAN: This is frightful.

MOTT: I remember. We did this one before . . . "Okay, I cutta you hair. But I don't take'a you Papa's money any more. You voice is a lousy."

BUMMIDGE: —In a rage, I throw myself on the barber. (*They wrestle clumsily. To* SHELDON) Hit me with the mop, you dummy.

SHELDON: But boss, I'm your bodyguard.

BUMMIDGE: (*Screams*) Hit me! . . . (*He stands after the blow, drinking its effect deeply*) Of course, I didn't tell. I sang at home. I pocketed the lesson money. (*Tests his unmusical voice*) Ha—Come back to Sorrento. You pig, un momento. I had no ear? Where was the ear? Papa twisted it. I think I was twelve. Yes, this is it, fellows. Twelve years old.

WINKLEMAN: He doesn't look a day under fifty-five.

BUMMIDGE: Absolutely twelve. In the candy store. Sheldon, you're my father. My father catches me stealing candy.

IMOGEN: What was your uncle really like?

WINKLEMAN: A thin meek man with a touch of palsy.

BUMMIDGE: Quiet there. I'm barreling. In Williamsburg, we were so poor, so poor. Underprivileged.

WINKLEMAN: Here comes the poor childhood once more.

IMOGEN: (*Smiles*) Yes.

BUMMIDGE *consults with* MOTT *and* SHELDON.

WINKLEMAN: How he had to fetch coal and wood. How he froze his bottom peddling papers and had to be rubbed with goosegrease. How they never had real toilet paper in the bathroom.

IMOGEN: Just orange wrappers, right?

WINKLEMAN: How his father beat him with the strap . . . with the buckle. Always gloating over his lousy memories.

BUMMIDGE: Papa wanted me to be a little old man, not a child. He hated children. Other kids got spending money. Not me. Papa said, "What for you need a nickel, ain't I got a candy store?" But I had to steal a piece of chocolate and wolf it down in the toilet. It would turn into a sweet choking foam. I gnashed the caramels. I gagged on molasses candy. Then he catches me. There's a Mary Jane wrapper floating in the bowl. He smells the peanut butter on my breath. Now Sheldon, you grab my ear. Yell, "Thief. Goniff!"

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SHELDON: Thief. Goniff.

BUMMIDGE: Ouch, Pa, you'll twist my ear off—Harder, Sheldon, don't just grip, twist. I've got to feel the pain.

MOTT: Turn it on, Sheldon.

BUMMIDGE: (*Shrieks*) That's it. Unbearable. I haven't felt this in forty years. (*Supplicating*) Papa, Papa, don't hurt me. I'm just a child. I'm hungry for sweet candy like the other children. It's the pleasure principle. It's Eros. Eros against Death.

MOTT: Give me your father's first name. . . .

BUMMIDGE: Boris.

MOTT: (*Falsetto*) Boris, don't hurt the boy.

SHELDON: (*After* BUMMIDGE *has coached him sotto voce*) My son, a crook?

BUMMIDGE: No Sheldon, his voice was deep. Papa had a ballsy voice. (*Basso*) A boy already thirteen. At thirteen I was already in the cap factory, bringing home pay. God helped, I got a little business, so I owe everybody. All day I'm standing on my kalletchete feet. With gall bladder. With blood pressure selling egg cream, mushmellows, funny papers, soda, dreck, gumballs. And you—loafer! The head lies in idleness? Got to eat candy? Stealing? I bring up an honest man, or I kill you. (*As twelve-year-old*) But Papa, darling papa, what can I do? I have human nature. I inherit it from you. My instinct says "Take a little candy, my child. Have a little comfort, life is so bitter and dark. Tohu bohu in America. Go in the toilet, and have a little joy. It gets me right under the jaw, like a needle, and my mouth waters. It was only one Mary Jane." And Papa says, "You be a mensch or I kill you. What are you, a dog? A chicken? Sonofabitch, sooner than bring up a stealer, I kill you!"—Imogen, have you got that?

IMOGEN: Every word.

BUMMIDGE: I want to get my hands on the veil of infantile amnesia and pull it down. And then I'll see—the great trauma, the hidden secret of my life. Oh. . . . (*he totters*)

SHELDON: What's the matter, boss?

BUMMIDGE: The pig, the white pig in my dream. I think it's Bella.

WINKLEMAN: Well, let's take a little break now. I've got to talk business with Bummy.

IMOGEN: There's coffee in the kitchen.

SHELDON: You okay, boss?

WINKLEMAN: Go on, beat it you mothering palooks. He pities himself enough. You trying to compete?

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IMOGEN, MOTT *and* SHELDON *go.*

BUMMIDGE: Wink, my childhood was frightful.

WINKLEMAN: Oh, screw your childhood. You've got more trouble now than you ever had. Bella wants to sign divorce papers.

BUMMIDGE: Are you joking? The terms are unacceptable.

WINKLEMAN: Come awn, Bummy. She's gone to twenty lawyers already. The fees can add up to more than the settlement. She says she wants out.

BUMMIDGE: What is she getting?

WINKLEMAN: Three thousand a month, tax free, the buildings on Staten Island, a piece of the club in Vegas. . .

BUMMIDGE: Vegas? But Madge is in that with me.

WINKLEMAN: What about me? I'm in it, too. We'll stay in. Only you'll be out.

BUMMIDGE: But it's six—seven hundred thousand. . . .

WINKLEMAN: Bella was always mad about you, and still is . . . But all these girls, and especially this latest one.

BUMMIDGE: It's my son who's behind this. Because I cut him off, he's going to get Bella's money. If he didn't pressure her, she wouldn't go through with a divorce. Isn't there a way to stop her?

WINKLEMAN: Actually, she's being reasonable. If you let it go to court, in addition to all the publicity, she'll get even more.

BUMMIDGE: Hell with the publicity.

WINKLEMAN: Do you want the papers to print stories about how you beat her? Hit her on the head so she had a concussion? Kicked her in the ribs? And when she was in the hospital you ran there every day and made a big noise till they let her out, but as soon as you got her home, you dumped her, because you were in a big card game.

BUMMIDGE: Don't go through all this. I know I have neurotic difficulties.

WINKLEMAN: I'm just reminding you what would come out in court.

BUMMIDGE: Kicked her in the ribs? I don't remember kicking her in the ribs. That's an interesting point.

WINKLEMAN: Getting her to dump that other broad—Sybil? And meanwhile you were playing around with Joyce—while Bella was doing everything possible. And while you were playing the Palladium, you registered at the Savoy with Joyce as Mr. and Mrs. Furthermore, she was seen there, naked, by your son, while your wife was at Payne Whitney with a nervous breakdown.

BUMMIDGE: That punk! He wouldn't dare testify against his father.

WINKLEMAN: Why not? He's very much your son.

BUMMIDGE: He's no good. And Ethel is no good.

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WINKLEMAN: He acts exactly like you. He walks like you, shrugs like you, holds his hands the way you do.

BUMMIDGE: In the ribs, you say? I must have been carried away. You know, that's therapeutically interesting for me. I must make a note of it. It's going to open things up. In the ribs. . . . But Wink. They're going to pile on me and ruin me. Ruin? I won't be able to function. I won't be able to earn. . . .

WINKLEMAN: Clever fellow. Oh cousin, you're smart all right. You always keep a stick of dynamite under the privy, and threaten to blow it all up. But there's another danger. You're losing your touch as a comic because you've become so serious. You've gone from low comedy to low seriousness.

BUMMIDGE: You don't understand. . . . A man finally has to try to raise the level of his life.

WINKLEMAN: If you didn't fracture Bella's skull, you'd raise it immediately.

BUMMIDGE: No, no, Winkie, don't have such low ideas.

WINKLEMAN: Why, cousin. You're a proud guy. You were a tremendous buffoon. Now you want to be a great scientific intellectual therapeutic something.

BUMMIDGE: The human condition is a disgrace. Don't you try to get out of it. You know as well as I do. Something must be done. Of course I've fouled my nest. And this shame. A vulgar life. But I have fine impulses, too. And they won't let me do anything about it but keep me in my low character. Are you afraid I'll leave you behind, Winkie?

WINKLEMAN: Are you actually going to act your crazy shtick on the closed circuit TV? You'll make a godawful fool of yourself before all those psychiatrists.

BUMMIDGE: (*Angry*) I'll stun 'em.

WINKLEMAN: Sure.

BUMMIDGE: I'll kill 'em, you watch. I have genuine ideas about therapy. Just because I didn't go to college, you think I have no mental capacity. (*Calmer*) Well, these are things you can't understand. But Wink, this divorce isn't a good idea.

WINKLEMAN: That's right. As long as Bella is your wife, you're safe from Joyce.

BUMMIDGE: (*Moody*) That's right.

WINKLEMAN: Oh, how you'd love to get rid of her!

BUMMIDGE: (*Unconvincingly*) What are you talking about? Whom have I got? I'm alone. And she's loyal.

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WINKLEMAN: How to tell the sardine and the piranha apart. Take a course with Bummidge, one of the great scientific minds of our times. She's not even pretty. She's got piano legs.

BUMMIDGE: Lay off, Wink. The girl's given up everything for me. She was a virgin. . . .

WINKLEMAN: When?

BUMMIDGE: I swear, she's never known any man but me.

WINKLEMAN: *You* swear! Listen, how much money did you put in her checking account last year? I'll bet it's close to five figures. Furniture, I know you spent twenty thousand to furnish the love nest. Then you got her a Thunderbird. Furs, rings. Then you skimped a little on a watch, and she threw it in your face, right?

BUMMIDGE: Details, mere details.

WINKLEMAN: And what's this analysis—to recover your lost youth. Should I go on?

BUMMIDGE: What are you talking about? I'm like a kid with her. Streaming with erotic energy. . . . Is your mother back from Hawaii?

WINKLEMAN: You want her for one of your guinea pigs? My eighty-six-year-old mother in the wheel chair? Your aunt? . . . Tell me, Bummy, what's behind all this auto-psychiatry? You're an artful character.

BUMMIDGE: Wink. It's on the level. The purpose is insight. Truth. Life. Human nature and destiny. You've got to break with common sense if you want to understand. The real desires are unconscious. You have to study madness, dreams and so-called accidents. Life is losing out. Death is waiting.

WINKLEMAN: So that's why you squander so much dough on this Joyce? I bet Death is feeling terrible from it.

BUMMIDGE: You know what I'm beginning to think?

WINKLEMAN: What?

BUMMIDGE: My mother gave me too many enemas.

WINKLEMAN: Mine, too. My heart sank when . . . Where're you going? We haven't solved any of these problems.

BUMMIDGE: I've got to devote the whole day to therapy. I've got to give a demonstration, don't forget.

WINKLEMAN: But Bella. . . .

BUMMIDGE: A white pig in my dreams. And that's very curious, that I should have amnesia about kicking her.

WINKLEMAN: Bummy, you should stick to what you *can* do. Clown.

BUMMIDGE: Make money, you mean. For that crew of mine. . . .

WINKLEMAN: Why be so two-faced about dough, Bummy. You know

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that if you couldn't spend a hundred grand on yourself, with your hundreds of suits and coats and thousands of shirts, and the luxury . . . and you yourself spoiled your children. You gave them chocolate in the cradle, raised them like king and queen.

BUMMIDGE: I see all that now. It's the bribe we all take to remain sick. This money is the enemy of life. Excuse me, Wink. Let's talk later.

ACT II

SCENE I

BUMMIDGE *and* SHELDON. BUMMIDGE *wears a special costume for the great therapeutic moment. It is a sort of Elizabethan gym suit. The ample knickers when spread out read Eros in front. Thanatos in back.* SHELDON *is holding by the straps a portable cradle with an infant in it.*

SHELDON: We better hurry up, boss. The doorman lent me this kid for a few minutes. It cost us twenty-five bucks.

BUMMIDGE: (*Takes the bills from his valise*) All right, quick, unwrap the kid. I have to have a look at an infant. The literature says infancy infancy, and all of a sudden I can't remember what they're like. I had to have a look.

SHELDON: You could look at one of your own grandchildren.

BUMMIDGE: I don't want to see my grandchildren.

Enter MOTT.

MOTT: What's the problem. . . . What's this kid?

BUMMIDGE: Sheldon, take off the shirt and diaper.

SHELDON: I'll just shove 'em down, I'm no good with the pins.

BUMMIDGE: (*Studying*) The human material stripped to its essentials.

MOTT: Maybe you should have got a little boy. Why'n't you order a boy? Send it back.

BUMMIDGE: The body . . . the body! The mystery!

MOTT: Never the same after puberty, is it?

BUMMIDGE: The experience is sinking in. I'm tingling and flushing all over. I see myself as an infant.

MOTT: A real sturdy kid. She'll grow up to be stacked.

SHELDON: Her mother is from the building. The doorman lent it to us. But if we don't get it back quick somebody's going to yell kidnap. The doorman is in a sweat.

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BUMMIDGE: I have to see this. Just see how she lets life drift into her. That's what's so simple for a little child, and so hard for us.

MOTT: Her mother a good looker?

BUMMIDGE: But already disfigured. (*Sighing*) Take her away, Sheldon. (SHELDON *hurries with infant—goes*) Even that kid is already traumatized. By birth. Before the ego could protect it. If there were some way to overcome the birth trauma! But no, coming into the world has to dog you awake and sleeping. In your dreams.

MOTT: (*Sadly shakes his head, clucking*) T-t-t-t.

BUMMIDGE: If you dream of water, that's what it is. If you dream of a canoe, that also is the birth trauma. Or a ride in a car. Going up and down in an elevator. Caves. Doorways. Lockers. Storerooms, refrigerators, bread boxes, shopping bags, pillow cases. All the womb. A coffin is the womb, or a mausoleum, a balloon, a space capsule. . . .

MOTT: The unconscious is so simpleminded, isn't it?

BUMMIDGE: As for birth—anything ripped or torn is birth. Explosions, suffocation dreams. Hanging on the gallows. Dreams or fantasies of volcanoes are birth. (*Shaking his head to collect himself*) But we're going to re-enact my engagement to Bella, after lunch. One of the big traumas. We worked it all out at the lunch table. Go fetch Imogen, Louie. Got to hurry it up. Not much time before the telecast. (*Exit* MOTT) Oh, how deep in myself I am. Everything is attached to me, so when I shake my head, yes or no, the whole world sways. It's all got meaning. What *is* the problem? The problem is the others. What's the matter, don't you like the others? Like 'em. I love 'em. Only I can't stand them. My heart greets them like a dog, with a fawning tongue. Ghastly love leaks out. I want to give 'em everything. Then all of a sudden I want them all to go away. I want them to be dead. I commit thought-murder on them. That's not sick; they say it's healthy. You don't really want to hurt 'em, only make them cease to be. If they want to pin me down, I get away. When a woman thinks she has me, I'm elsewhere. That's the Ego, between Life on the right and Death on the left, keeping both away. I! My own law! I! Away! Let me be! Alone! Agh! . . and that's the sickness. I'm so easy to con into things. But then my own will moves in and. . . .

Enter IMOGEN *and* MOTT.

IMOGEN: We're ready to do your engagement. . . .

Enter SHELDON.

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MOTT: Sheldon is the Father. I'm the Mother. Imogen is Miss Bella Boxer, your fiancee. . . .

BUMMIDGE: Why did I get mixed up with this middleclass gang? I was in Showbiz already. I guess I couldn't stand the lonely life on the road—hotel rooms. I didn't drink, I was too repressed. Then I met Bella Boxer. Her family had dough. Papa Boxer manufactured chopped herring, eggplant, Greek salad and such stuff. . . .

Enter BELLA.

IMOGEN: (*Acting*) I'm six weeks late. What are we going to do? But that's all right, Bummy, don't worry about it.

BUMMIDGE: Oh, my God! I didn't really enjoy it!

BELLA: Did I? It was over in a minute.

She is unheeded.

BUMMIDGE: It was a beautiful Sunday in May. I took time off from my grim life to have a passing look at lilacs . . . The Boxers are having a card party—Father Boxer says, "Come down to the basement and help me bring up chairs." . . .

SHELDON: Help me bring up chairs.

BUMMIDGE: And when he gets me down there by the furnace, he grabs me and yells what did you do to my child. . . .

SHELDON: (*Shaking him*) What did you do to my child—The father's heart is busting.

BUMMIDGE: This you do to a father?

SHELDON: This you do to a father?

BUMMIDGE: Punishment for my sins. Pain, fear, doubt, guilt. The Id tries to show its rage. But the censorship distorts it into laughter. Ha, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha. I'm fighting my own father.

BELLA: My father was a gentleman. Don't compare him to your father.

BUMMIDGE: And Mother Boxer comes down the stairs and says, "Please, please, we have guests. . . ."

MOTT: Please—we have guests.

BELLA: Who is this creep!

MOTT: I beg pardon. . . .

BELLA: If you want to know what really happened, I'll show you.

BUMMIDGE: Your mother threw her arms around me and cried, "Do you love my baby!"

BELLA: Yeah? Well, move over a little, and I'll open your eyes somewhat. Imogen, you play my mother for a second, will you? You're talking to me, and you say, "What do you want with *him,* Bella? He's going to turn into a fat, selfish old fool. . . ."

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BUMMIDGE: She never said that!

BELLA: Go on, please, Imogen. . . .

IMOGEN: What do you want with *him,* Bella? He's going to turn into a fat selfish old fool. . . .

BELLA: Right, Mother. I know he's coarse and unattractive, a big show-off. But I've had a few bad disappointments, and I'm not getting younger. I go out with these types around . . . and they don't really send me either. I think I'll have this one. He doesn't know a thing about love, but for some reason my heart is fastened on him.

BUMMIDGE: Imogen, pay no attention. Whose therapy is it, anyway! Whose payroll are you on? Mother Boxer said, I won't let . . .

MOTT: (*Pushes his way in*) I won't let you marry my child if you don't love her. . .

BUMMIDGE: Mrs. Boxer . . . I don't know . . . I'm still very young.

BELLA: And then you started to blubber, and I slapped your face.

BUMMIDGE: That's true. I wept. Louie! Me! I wept.

MOTT: It shows you were emotionally pretty open.

BELLA: And then I said, here's something to cry about. (*She slaps him*)

BUMMIDGE: (*Holding his cheek*) I feel it all . . . This is very rich material.

BELLA: I'll freshen your memory some more. You said, isn't there somebody else she can marry? And my father nearly killed him.

BUMMIDGE: I knew there was something else. He choked me. Sheldon, choke me. Hurry, don't break the action. Choke!

SHELDON *puts his hands about his throat.*

I'm not feeling it.

SHELDON: I'm sorry boss, but I'm a bodyguard. My instinct is to defend you.

Enter Western Union messenger.

BUMMIDGE: Somebody must choke me. . . . You (*to messenger*) I want you to choke me.

MESSENGER: It'll give me great pleasure. (*He brutally chokes* BUMMIDGE)

BUMMIDGE: Ahg! (SHELDON *and* MOTT *have difficulty getting the messenger's fingers loose*)

SHELDON: What's the matter, you out of your mind?

MESSENGER: No. He asked for it. I just learned to grab all opportunities. You've got to be prepared, work fast. In and out. It's my career.

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BUMMIDGE: (*Feebly*) Tip him. . . .

MESSENGER: Sign here.

IMOGEN: (*Signs and opens*) It's not for Bummy, it's for Winkie.

Messenger goes.

BUMMIDGE: I think I'd better lie down a little.

BELLA: Give him an empirin, Imogen. I've got to go to Steuben's to return some glassware they sent to me by mistake. Joyce bought it on his charge, and they assumed she was Mrs. Bummidge. That at least is saving a few hundred bucks.

ACT II

SCENE IV

Television studio. Enter BUMMIDGE *in high excitement.* MOTT *follows. The stage is set for the closed circuit television program. Light on* BUMMIDGE'S *analytic couch, front and right. Another light presently goes on left to show others who make occasional comments unheard by* BUMMIDGE.

BUMMIDGE: This is the great moment when I reveal my achievements to the scientific world. Oh, I can't bear the excitement. Oh, science! I want to devote myself to it. Knowledge! The last pure thing in the world. If you consider my life as a life it's just gruesome. But if you consider it as a *subject* matter. . . . ! Louie, don't goof now Louie. Don't try to show off in front of the camera. Remember, this is a solemn . . . oh, a solemn . . . oh, a big thing!

MOTT: (*Reproachful*) Now, Mr. Bummidge. . . .

BUMMIDGE: Now, just remember you're my scientific assistant. When we publish the results you'll get full acknowledgment. And if this endowment goes through . . . you'll be made also. I'll see to it that you get top billing. There's nothing in all the world like my gratitude when I get going.

MOTT: I never really made it with a beautiful woman. From the start it's been nothing but dogs. . . .

BUMMIDGE: Listen, Louie, I can promise you. . . . I'm terribly nervous. My fingers are so cold, it's crazy. Louie . . . I promise! Louie, don't get near the camera until I cue you, and duck out on cue. We've had a dozen rehearsals.

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MOTT: Just depend on me.

Phone rings. BUMMIDGE *answering.*

BUMMIDGE: Yes? Yes, Harold. . . . (*Hangs up*) It's the count-down. Imogen! Where's Imogen?

Enter IMOGEN *with* WINKLEMAN, *left, in the spotlight.*

Ah, stand by! Wish me luck. It's the greatest!

IMOGEN: All the best, Bummy.

BUMMIDGE *and* MOTT *consulting. They put on television cosmetics.*

WINKLEMAN: All the psychiatrists are getting ready for the laugh of their lives.

IMOGEN: Oh, Winkie, really! You know your cousin is brilliant.

WINKLEMAN: Luckily, there are commercial interests at the Waldorf, watching. So it shouldn't be a total loss. There's great wealth in Bummy still. I feel it. And to be as fantastic as he is can only be possible with wealth. Sometimes I think I've over-accepted reality, and he's under-accepted it. But Imogen, I want to ask you something. You know, you could be the ideal wife for a millionaire. I have all these clients whose estates I manage. Some of them are fools, you know.

IMOGEN: Are they?

WINKLEMAN: I have to keep them away from gold-digging broads. It isn't easy for a millionaire to find a suitable mate. Now you're an ideal millionaire's wife.

IMOGEN: Do you think so?

WINKLEMAN: I swear. Restful, calm, accepting, undemanding, beautiful, kind. Restful!

IMOGEN: I didn't know that.

WINKLEMAN: And very beautiful. Just look at your hands—your fingers. Now look at mine. Yours are more human than mine. Don't you see that?

Phone again.

BUMMIDGE: Harold? Okay? Two minutes? (*Hangs up*) Sheldon! Sheldon! Hey, Sheldon!

Enter SHELDON.

Now I want nobody butting in. Understand?

SHELDON: I know . . . I can't get used to these TV cosmetics.

BUMMIDGE: Just don't let anybody near me. Like in a surgery. (*To technicians*) Everything set? All the wires. I don't want to trip over any wires.

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SHELDON *joins* IMOGEN *and* WINKLEMAN. *Presently* MADGE *and* BELLA *also enter, and toward the end* JOYCE *and* MAX.

(BUMMIDGE *on phone again*) Dr. Lefkowitz! You're standing by. I'll hear from you as soon as the presentation is over! You'll see. My method will save minds. The five hundred thousand? You bet the offer was good. (*Hangs up. Capers*)

Last ring.

MOTTS (*Answers*) Five, four, three, two (*pointing at* BUMMIDGE) one.

BUMMIDGE: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. (*He reads at first, soon abandons manuscript*) I thank you for your courtesy in watching my demonstration. I know you will welcome new ideas and not resent untrained talent. I read all the literature I could get my hands on and slugged it out with all the toughest—mentally. It seemed to me as an actor that I had a good chance to objectify my neurotic troubles, and also to bring back the past by playing it out. My main trouble I named Bummidge's Syndrome, or humanitis. Put it simply, can you love somebody else as you love yourself? When the infant has its mouth on the mother's titty . . . but these are things you know. We were all once covered with flowers, but we turn into garbage dumps—ashes and clay. Humanitis means that you begin to come on with another person, but all of a sudden you can't bear him any more. Take the sonofabitch away! (*He starts to gasp and cough*) Away! Zoom! It isn't that I don't like people. I need 'em, I even love 'em. So why can't I bear 'em? The first thing I did was to create a clear channel between past and present. Like that old song

I'm just a kid again
Doin' what I did again
When that red, red robin, goes bob-bob-bobbin along

You get it? (*He bounces a ball, rolls a hoop, sucks his thumb, cries, drinks from a baby bottle*) I also did a certain amount on the couch (*Lies on couch*) Doctor, I had a dream last night (*As analyst*) What did you dream, Mr. Bummidge? (*On couch*) I dreamed I was at sea in a shoebox. (*Before camera again*) By dream analysis, I isolated a hard core of problems. Of problems. You see—problems. And these I played out. Which I will demonstrate with my colleague, Mr. Louis Mott.

MOTT: *Doctor* Mott. (*He mugs throughout the following*)

BUMMIDGE: He will play my father in a typical episode. I have been on the street playing stickball and am late for supper. The age is

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twelve. Childhood pleasure has no place in my father's scheme. He is hacking away at the pleasure *prinzip*. Converting *lust* into *unlust*.

MOTT: Where you been, loafer?

BUMMIDGE: He used to hit me under the nose with his forefinger.

MOTT: Six o'clock, you can't come home?) (*Strikes* BUMMIDGE *under nose*)

BUMMIDGE: Ow! Ow! (*He has a nosebleed*) You stupid bastard. I'm bleeding. (*He limps about stage holding nose*)

IMOGEN: Bummy, you're hurt. Shall I get a compress?

BUMMIDGE: Stay away.

WINKLEMAN: Tip your head back.

MOTT: Should I read them a little till it stops?

BUMMIDGE *makes frightful faces at* MOTT, *back to camera.* MOTT *reads.*

Such brutality often results in homosexuality, if the son idolizes the father's strength. That luckily did not happen. My father didn't want me to have a childhood, however. (*To* BUMMIDGE) Be a man!—My father also had the Bummidge Syndrome.

BUMMIDGE: (*Pushing Louie aside*) I had a wild, yearning, crude love for him. (*Imitates a small boy, weeping*) Papa, I love you. Don't hurt me. I love Mama. I do anything. Look how my throat is hurting from the lump. Please don't hit my nose anymore. Please don't pull off my ears. (*Himself*) Pleading against the castration.

MOTT: Shut up! In the street with bums and trombeniks. Then you come home—ess and fress. I kill you dead!

BUMMIDGE: Oh, Papa, don't show your teeth. Don't eat your little boy. You brought me into the world. I wish I had never been born. (*In normal tone*) My parents always wanted me to be about thirty years old. I was obstinate. I remained a child. Every Christmas to this day I still buy myself toys.

WINKLEMAN *telling* IMOGEN. *"It's the truth"*

No, I won't, you dassn't. (*Stamps his foot, etc.*)—Well, I learned a lot this way. . . . But what I learned mostly was how I could pounce on the deepest secrets of my life. This came about through my orientation method. (*Kneels on the couch—a trance-like moment*) I'm establishing my center, establishing my center. Who am I? Bummidge. And what is Bummidge? A crumb of the cosmos—almost nothing. Male. Contemporary. Age fifty-four. Fifty-five years ago I was nothing. I was merely possible. When I was conceived, I became inevitable. When I die, I'll become impossible. Meanwhile,

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between two voids, here I am, actual and unique. I've got this nose with the big pores, this solid behind, this belly like a rock, (*thumps it*) these meaty lips, these knuckles which have always made me unhappy—gorilla knuckles. This heart that never stops. This character. This mind. Oh, this mind, it's murdering me. But . . . the essential me. So here goes: My life before 1905—nothing. Blackness. Tohu-bohu. . . . So the year is about 1905, and it must be the month of January. It's behind the candy store, in the brass bed. And it must be night, because they'd have been too busy in the daytime. In the back was a coalstove with a nickel crown, and big cheeks and fiery windows. But here they are.

IMOGEN: His father and mother.

BUMMIDGE: And he takes. And then she. . . .Oh, she can't. She's undressed. And he. . . . It's vile. No, no, no! It's the primal scene. Oh, that bitch! Throwing herself away. And nobody can interfere. To them it's nothing. They're ignorant. Pa—Ma—wait! Oh, wait! What are you doing! Stop! But how can they stop? Who is there to come between them? This is bigger than any of us. I'm being conceived. Pray, Philip Bomovitch, pray. (*He clasps hands, praying*) But it's too late. My number is up. Bang! And may God have mercy on my soul. All our souls. I'm doomed to be born. Thrown into being.

WINKLEMAN: Oh, brother. Even the old name. Bomovitch!

BUMMIDGE: (*Lies on the couch, legs drawn up in the foetal position*) I'm in the womb now. The cells are dividing like mad: four, eight, sixteen, one twenty-eight, one billion. Iron, phosphorus and starch are boiling. My eyes, kneecaps, pancreas and hair are developing. I'm being created.

Meanwhile, what is Mama up to? (*Indignantly sits*) Gossiping, eating herring and potatoes, drinking tea with lump sugar. That's why my teeth look like dice. How did Freud's mother pass the time? Thinking, I'll bet. Reading serious books in German. (*Throws himself back again*) But I'm floating inside. (*Curls his fingers and tries to look like an embryo*) I'm folding, unfolding, refolding. The mesoderm, the endoderm. Now I'm a fish. (*Elongates himself*) Ontogony, phylogony, do your stuff. Notochord. Gills, Reptiles. Up to the vertebrate tree. Up—up!

MADGE *with alarm, dumbshow, inquiring, receiving explanation. During the ensuing,* BELLA *and* MAX *join the group, and do not appear surprised at what they see.*

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BUMMIDGE: Now, I'm a mannikin with a pipe in my belly, hairy all over. I'm reaching the stage of Man. And this is snug harbor, paradise. I'm retired before I'm born. But it can't last. Change rules over us all. Oh, the pains are starting. Contractions. (*He doubles up*) Fifteen, ten, eight, four, two. Oh, Mother, our time has come. The bag breaks. Help. I'm grounded, it's dry in here. What is that pushing? I'm sea-sick. I begin to hear screams. They're hollering outside, Mama louder than the rest. The water is hot. There are clean newspapers on the floor. Look at the midwife. She has snuff in her lip. She carries icetongs. She has whiskers. Pa is rolling his eyes. I'm being expelled into life. Torn from safety. I'm having the birth trauma. Oh, ooooh!

MADGE: It was a difficult birth. Mama would often talk about it.

BUMMIDGE: I'm choking—choking! Yach! Air, air, get me air. Give me oxygen. My eyes are scalded. Help. Call the pulmotor. (*Newborn, with wrinkled face and clenched fists*) Oh. (*He slaps himself on the behind and gives the feeble infant wail*) Eh-eh-eeehh! (*Mott with a piece of cotton daintily cleans his upturned face*) So this is the external world! (*Mott holds an inflated balloon to his face*) She holds me in her arms and gives me the breast. Bliss! I'm Emperor of all pleasure. Master of all the loving world. I am it. It is me.

SHELDON: I.

BUMMIDGE: (*Makes a face*) Mrrgha.

WINKLEMAN: Weaning.

BUMMIDGE: Driven from Paradise again. The beginning of knowledge. Disappointment. Strife. The reality *prinzip*. The Ego formation. Aggression. . . . Death. Law. Thou shalt not. (*Simpering child*) But Mama. You fascinating. All over electric. (*As mother*) Wicked, bad boy! Bad, bad, bad! I'll tell Papa. (*As child*) Oh, Mama, no! Protect me. I be your slave. . . . And so I must bow my head to the Oedipus complex. Flesh is a cross to bear. And now I'm on my own. In the street. The horses try to knock me down. The trolley is about to grind my guts. The fire-escape . . . I fall from the roof. Society wants to harness me. Disease wants to infect me. Death is rocking the boat . . . I run, and hide, and lie and steal and hate and lust. No time to hitch my stockings, dry my nose. . . . And so life unfolds, ladies and gentlemen. Puberty passes. I go into the world. I have my poor inventions.

(*Sings*) *I live over the wye-educt*
Down by the winegar-woiks.

BELLA: When I first met him, he was doing that.

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BUMMIDGE: Quickly, to the top. I have agents, bodyguards, white Dusenberg. Chauffeur. Dark glasses. Camel's hair coat. (*Juts out his behind and struts with self importance*) Best seats in the Garden. Races. Tailors. Special barbers. Custom-made cigars. Ten million fans. When I change my pants it's in the paper. When I cross the street somebody puts a Christopher medal in my hand. But I am restless. I have humanitis. My success is empty. My life is not real. Oh, how can I pull the plug and let the dirty water out of my soul. Value, value, give me value. Oh, for some substance. Men and brethren, I make you laugh. But let us . . . let us Agh! Gagh!

SHELDON: That his emotional attack.

BUMMIDGE: And don't come near. Alone! Not you! Not me! (*Again to television*) This portion of the presentation is unplanned.

MOTT: That's true, ladies and gentlemen.

BUMMIDGE: Making all the rules. My enemies are those who won't do as I say. My terms or nothing. A law unto myself. It's a unrehearsed confession. I want to confess my vanity and pride. I'm staggered. I didn't like the world. I made up another. And angry with people because they had a different version. . . . Dared to differ. . . . Bum- is a mad tyrant. And humanitis! The first birth is awful. But the second is from your own empty heart. . . .It, it. . .

Ringing. MOTT *answers.*

MOTT: Yes? Okay. We're off the air now, Bummy. You'd better lie down awhile. (*Leads him to couch*)

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Stephen Spender

THE MODERN AS VISION OF A WHOLE SITUATION

The confrontation of the past with the present seems to me the fundamental aim of modernism. The reason why it became so important was that, in the early stages of the movement, the moderns wished to express the *whole* experience of modern life.

The feeling that the modern world, even if its values are fragmented, nevertheless shares a fate that in being modern is whole, is important. It results doubtless from contrasting the past as variety of traditions and the present as the single irremediable event which is progress. The present is looked upon as a fatal knowledge that has overtaken the whole of civilization and has broken the line of tradition with the past. This situation can therefore only be apprehended as a whole, as tragedy or overwhelming disaster, unless indeed it can be viewed optimistically.

If the concept of wholeness is abandoned then at once work becomes fragmentary, the parts cut off from the whole. This is the characteristic of futurism that it separates the future finally from the past. It is also the characteristic of the reaction against modernism, which accepts the idea that there can only be "minor" fragmented art. Thus today when certain poets and critics say that they can only aim at elegance and correctness of form, they reveal that they have accepted the idea of writing within a fragmentary part of the fragmented situation, instead of trying to comprehend the situation itself in a single vision that restores wholeness to the fragmentation, even by realizing it as disaster.

Of course, a reaction against the modern movement was inevitable, and there is no argument that it should have continued

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until the present time. It demands respect however when it lingers on in the work of that heroic survivor, Samuel Beckett. Beckett is characteristically modern in that he makes his audience aware that the mysterious eloquent apathy of his characters is the result of a whole external disaster in surrounding history.

When we read the following by Miss Pamela Hansford Johnson on Literature in *The Baldwin Age* we ask ourselves whether it is not Miss Johnson who is "in retreat":

> The full retreat began in the years between 1922 and 1925, the years that saw *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Ulysses*. It was the retreat into perimental experiment in verbal and oral techniques: and it pretty well dominated the English novel for the next thirty years . . .
>
> What shrivelled away in their work was any contact between man and society. "Bloomsday" is Bloom's alone and no-one else's: Mrs. Dalloway, if she is anything at all, is merely herself, walking in her own dream of a private world. Everything dropped away from the novel but Manner: all that counted was how the thing was done, and never the thing itself. We must blame no writer for the influence he exerts on his successors: to have been an influence at all is a seal of achievement. Yet the followers of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce began to lead the novel into sterility. And nobody saw anything wrong in that inexorable and dangerous process. Why not? Because life was growing too hard for writers to face, and quiet lay in impotency alone.

It is difficult to disentangle this. It reads like lines deliberately crossed in order to confuse and mislead. For example, in the muddling up of Joyce and Mrs. Woolf as though they were one flesh like Hamlet's uncle and his mother, or Sir Charles and Lady Snow; and writing that no one "saw anything wrong" in these writers—as though F. R. Lewis and Wyndham Lewis had not spent years conducting the most vigorous polemics against Virginia Woolf (as also against James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence).

The passage confuses two important issues. For while on the one hand it is untrue to imply that there was no contact between man and society in James Joyce, it is true that the method of the interior monologue, which in *Ulysses* was a technique for presenting not just his main characters but also a whole society as a state of consciousness, became in Virginia Woolf's work largely an instru-

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ment for projecting her own sensibility; and in that of other writers, for subjective outpourings.

The important point which becomes suppressed in Miss Hansford Johnson's essay, is that although Joyce employed a technique of subjective monologue in his work, the intent of his writing was to achieve an almost total objectivity. *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* may not be complete successes. It is difficult to imagine how they could be, considering that the aim of Joyce in *Ulysses* was to invent an imaginative form which would express the whole experience of modern life, and in *Finnegans Wake,* the whole of history. Perhaps they were gigantic achievements which include elements of gigantic failure. But to dismiss them as mere "experiments" whose discoveries have been usefully absorbed into the novels of C. P. Snow is to overlook what remains truly important and challenging about them: that they attempt to envisage modern life as a whole complexity enclosed within a consciousness conditioned by circumstances that are entirely of today. They state a challenge which perhaps they did not meet and which perhaps cannot be met, although they indicate the scale of it. And what has come after the works which Miss Hansford Johnson so easily dismisses is fragments of a fragmented view of civilization, and is on an altogether lesser scale.

The movements of modern literature and art are programs of techniques for expressing this whole view of the past-future confrontation. There are different types of programs which might be analyzed as establishing the following categories:

1. Realization through new art of the modern experience.
2. The invention through art of a pattern of hope, influencing society.
3. The idea of an art which will fuse past with present into the modern symbolism of a shared inner life.
4. Art as pattern for a technique of living through self-induced sensation.
5. The Revolutionary concept of Tradition.

1. *Realization* is the primary gesture of modernism, the determination to invent a new style in order to express the deeply felt change in the modern world. Industrial towns, machines, revolutions,

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scientific thinking, are felt to have altered the texture of living. Everyday language and taste reflect these changes, even though the image they mirror is ugly. It is only art that remains archaic, forcing its ideas into forms and manners that are outmoded. Therefore artists have to learn the idiom of changed speech, vision and hearing, and mold the modern experience into forms either revolutionized or modified.

The outstanding characteristic of realization is, then, the great attention paid to inventing an idiom which responds to the tone of voice of contemporaries, the changed vision of a world of machines and speed, the rhythms of an altered contemporary tempo, the new voice of a humanity at times when the old social hierarchies are breaking down.

The street speaks the idiom and the idiom, in the mind of the artist, invents the form. Joyce and Eliot in their early work are realizers of the modern idiom in their poetry and their poetic prose. In music, Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* is a classic example of the realization of the 1920's in Germany as idiom. In his Blue Period, Picasso had supremely this quality of realization, like the Eliot of *Preludes*:

> *I am moved by fancies that are curled*
> *Around these images, and cling;*
> *The notion of some infinitely gentle*
> *Infinitely suffering thing.*

The human element is often reduced to pathos, clownishness, in *Wozzek,* Blue Period Picasso, the early Eliot. In Apollinaire as in some of the German Expressionists, this clownishness acquires a quality of touching and nobly absurd heroism.

2. By the pattern of hope, I mean—and this certainly will seem an unfashionable view today—the idea that modern art might transform the contemporary environment, and hence, by pacifying and ennobling its inhabitants, revolutionize the world (there is, surely, a pun on this idea in the program of Eugene Jolas in his magazine *transition*—"the revolution of the word").

The word *hope* has to be understood seriously, as Malraux still intended it when he entitled his Spanish civil war novel *Espoir.* Early in the century, hope was based on the international inter-arts

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community of the alliance between the ballet, architecture, furniture design, painting, music and poetry, all of them participating in the movement to revolutionize taste, and at the same time make it an operative acting and criticizing force in modern life. The way in which art might revolutionize the environment and hence, by implication, people living in it, is explored in many of the manifestoes of poets and painters early in the century. The famous *Der Blaue Reiter* (1914), the anthology of the group of painters which was founded in Munich in 1909, is prefaced with remarks of which these are characteristic:

"Everything which comes into being, on earth can only have its beginning." This sentence by Daeubler might stand written over all our inventing and all our aims. A fulfillment will be attained, some time, in a new world, in another existence (*Dasein*). On earth we are only able to state the theme. This first volume is the prelude to a new theme . . . We wander with our passionate wishes through the art of this time and through the present age.

This is touching, innocent, mysteriously exciting. The same dream of transforming the world—but this time the world of actuality in which we live—is expressed by Wyndham Lewis, a decade later, in *The Tyro*:

Art, however, the greatest art, even, has it in its power to influence everybody. Actually the shapes of the objects (houses, cars, dresses and so forth) by which they are surrounded have a very profound subconscious effect on people. A man might be unacquainted with the very existence of a certain movement in art, and yet his life would be modified directly if the street he walked down took a certain shape, at the dictates of an architect under the spell of that movement, whatever it were. Its forms and colors would have a tonic or a debilitating effect on him, an emotional value. Just as he is affected by the change of the atmosphere, without taking the least interest in the cyclonic machinery that controls it, so he would be directly affected by any change in his physical milieu.

A man goes to choose a house. He is attracted by it or not, often, not for sentimental or practical reasons, but for some reason that he does not seek to explain, and that yet is of sufficient force to prevent

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him from, or decide him on, taking it. This is usually an example of the functioning of the aesthetic sense (however underdeveloped it may be in him) of which we are talking. The painting, sculpture and general design of today, such as can be included in the movement we support, aims at nothing short of a physical reconstructing and recording of the visible part of the world.

The theme of hope re-connects an art, which has been driven inwards into the isolated being of the artist, with the external world, by accomplishing a revolution in the community which is taught to share the visions of modern artists. In being victimized, oppressed, and in having dreams, the artist already meets the insulted and the oppressed who pray for change, although their aspirations may be far removed from his visions. But it is important to him that his visions are nevertheless closer to the poor and the powerless than to those who are rich and enjoy power. Hence the current of revolutionary feeling which runs alike through dadaist, expressionist and surrealist manifestoes. Each group claims to be the true revolutionaries of life, and that the stream which it represents would join with the stream of the social revolution; if only the revolutionaries were not too philistine to realize that modern art represents the democracy of the unconscious forces which should be equated with economic democracy! Hence the surrealists were later to insist that they were Communists. Some of them—Aragon, Tristan Tzara—even, as surrealists, joined the Communist Party, later to renounce surrealism as bourgeois. The smile was on the face of the tiger.

3. Art which will transform reality into shared inner life, is the converse of (2) which would transform inner vision into outer social change. It is the idea that the images of the materialist modern world can be "interpreted," made to become symbols of inner life where they are reconciled with the older things symbolized by words like "jug," "mountain," "star," "cross." This process was the infinitely patient research of experience of Rilke. It finds its completest realization in the *Duino Elegies,* where the Angels are set up as almost machine-like figures over the human landscape in which there is the fair, the world of values that are money. The angels are perpetually occupied in transforming the world of outward materialism back into inner tragic values.

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The connection of poetry here with iconographic modern painting is evident. One of the *Duino Elegies* is inspired by Picasso's *Les Saltimbanques,* in which Rilke sees the method of interpretation of the performers in the fairground who are at once traditional and contemporary.

The fascinating letter (Sierre: 13.11.25) of Rilke to Witold von Hulewicz deserves to rank with Shelley's famous essay as a twentieth century *Defence of Poetry.* If Shelley saw poets as the "unacknowledged legislators," Rilke saw them as the inventors of a machinery of symbolism which transforms the actual into the significant material of inner being, reconciling within ourselves the past and the present. The whole letter requires the closest attention, and the few passages here quoted are only used to fortify this argument:

> We, the men of the present and today, we are not for one moment in the world of time, nor are we fixed in it; we overflow continually towards the men of the Past, towards our origin and towards those who apparently come after us. In that most vast, *open* world all beings are—one cannot say "contemporaneous," for it is precisely the passage of Time which determines that they all *are.* This transitoriness rushes everywhere into a profound Being.

This reads perhaps like oriental philosophy, but it is the view which provides in the most concrete sense the groundwork of Rilke's poetry:

> The Elegies show us engaged on this work, the work of the perpetual transformation of beloved and tangible things into the invisible vibration and excitability of our nature, which introduces new "frequencies" into the pulsing fields of the universe . . .

The view put forward here, which is also surely the "groundwork" for the eclecticism of Yeats, is that values, become detached from facts, can nevertheless remain liquescent and molten in our consciousness. Whatever the objections to this view (and the objections are all of the kind that point out that to expect men to believe in values that are unsupported by dogmas and institutions is expecting altogether too much), a world of constant change can only be confronted by values so intensely imagined, so spiritualized, that they

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become independent of dogmas, institutions, and actual traditional objects. All has to be reborn each instant as memory to confront external change. And if the poets are incapable of such incandescence, then the divorce between dogmatic beliefs they nurture in themselves for the sake of their art, and the world of changing appearances will become evident. Or those who are today's up-to-date critics tied to the values of the Great Tradition will become tomorrow's antiquaries. As Rilke puts the matter:

> Even for our grandfathers a house, a fountain, a familiar tower, their very clothes, their coat, was infinitely more, infinitely more intimate; almost every object a vessel in which they found something human or added their morsel of humanity. Now, from America, empty different things crowd over to us, counterfeit things, the veriest dummies. A house, in the American sense, an American apple or one of the vines of that country has *nothing* in common with the house, the fruit, the grape into which have entered the hope and meditation of our forefathers. The lived and living things, the things that share our thoughts, these are on the decline and can no more be replaced. *We are perhaps the last to have known such things.* The responsibility rests with us not only to keep remembrance of them (that would be but a trifle and unreliable), but also their human or 'laric' value ('laric' in the sense of household gods). The earth has no alternative but to become invisible—IN us, who with a portion of our being have a share in the Invisible, or at least the appearance of sharing; we who can multiply our possessions of the Invisible during our earthly existence, in us *alone* can there be accomplished this intimate and continual transmutation of the Visible into the Invisible . . . just as our destiny becomes unceasingly more present, and at the same time invisible, in us.

The machinery of the symbolism of the angels becomes apparent. They are the agents which transform the memoried past into the invisible which flows over and acts upon the present.

4. The Alternate Life of Art. By this I mean something different from (3), the hope that art might become the agency for inspiring a transformed society, and (4) the use of art to interpret the external materialism into the language of inner life. The Alternate Life is when it is intended that the processes of art are brought close to the borderline ecstatic or sexual experiences. I am thinking here of the

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exaltation of violence, sexual relations, madness, drugs, through art which is regarded by the artist as a transition towards the actual experience of these states. Lawrence surely often regarded his writing not as an end but as a means of inducing in the reader a state of feeling which would release in him the "dark forces" or "phallic consciousness," or the approach to the mystic-physical sexual union which were more important to him than the writing on the page.

The tendency here is to regard writing as hallucinatory: that is to say as a literary technique for inducing non-literary sensations. The poet, supposedly, has a peculiar insight into life-sensations which he upholds as more "real" than the externals which are everyday reality. The surrealists used poetry as a technique for inducing states of mind supposedly super-real. It might be said that surrealist writing is itself the super-reality, but if this were true, it would only be in the way that incantation may itself be what is invoked: a strangeness of feeling without language that lies beyond the threshold of the words. However much one disapproves of non-literary aims in literature, nevertheless there is importance for literature itself in the view of writing as provider of alternate life. For we live in a time when material values are generally regarded as the most important ones, sometimes for selfish reasons, but sometimes also (as in the case of those who want to improve the material conditions of the poor) for altruistic ones. Therefore the view that there are "other" values of living becomes extremely important for art, even if it accepts the subsidiary position of being only a means to attain ends which lie outside art. The definition of surrealism, by André Breton, which I quote from David Gascoyne's *Surrealism,* is relevant:

> SURREALISM, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought. Thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the real reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.
>
> ENCYCL. *Philos.* Surrealism rests in the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected heretofore; in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought. It tends definitely to do away with all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in the solution of the principal problem of life.

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Just as futurism is the expression of an impulse to repudiate the whole of the past which is common to several movements called by different names, so surrealism has features in common with quite a few other movements. All the "alternate life of art" movements attempt to discover through art, or to use art to discover, spiritual, sensual, or esoteric forces, which restore the balance of inner life against industrialized societies.

The tendency to seek such a compensation of life through art, and of art through life, was already present with Byron, Keats and Shelley. "Oh for a life of pure sensation!" apostrophized Keats.

Sensuality tinged with despair and anticipation of death tended to produce a mood in which he regarded the taste of a peach or rose, with its further suggestion of a drug, as lines of poetry, lines of poetry as a peach or rose. He was tasting, I suggest, at these moments the taste of his own being as a poet, and delighting in it. Today at a later stage of individual despair there is a meeting ground in drugs, violence, sexual relations, hallucination, madness, between poets and non-poets who live the life of poetry regarded as experienced sensation. The "dark forces" released through sexual passion or through "phallic consciousness," the mystical-physical sexual union, surely suggest in Lawrence a meeting in which the art-sensation is the equivalent of the life-sensation. The reader is recommended to have sex in the way which will identify for him the sensation described in the words. Significantly, Lawrence disapproved all sex which is not experienced exactly in the way that he describes, or prescribes it. And the purpose of this is not, of course, pornographic. It is to assert the proximate reality and force of experienced sensation against the abstract supra-personal forces of machinery and social organization.

Here, the confusion of art-experience with life-experience seems dangerous. The example of movements such as that of the Beats in America shows the degradation of life, through art and of art through life, which follows from the substitution of what is supposed to be the life of the artist for the effort required to create art.

5. By the Revolutionary concept of Tradition, I mean the introduction, into certain works, of selected traditions. Often such use of tradition seems outrageous to those who regard themselves as traditionalists. A famous example of the transformation, distortion

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and even perversion of a tradition into expression of ideas that may seem its opposite, is Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal.* The traditionally catholic consciousness of Baudelaire realizes itself in the pursuit of evil. Grace is discovered in damnation, and the only part of the faith that does not seem to have undergone a terrible transmutation, is the doctrine of Original Sin. The process by which the little flowers of St. Francis become in the late nineteenth century the flowers of evil, can also be reversed, and a certain intensity of corruption or debauchery can be taken as a sign of grace. Claudel was converted to catholicism by reading the poems of Rimbaud, *poète maudit, par excellence.*

The justification of this conversion of traditions into art which seems almost their opposite is, of course, that for the person who has been really born into the true life of the tradition the modern world produces the distortion. If Ulysses were a wanderer on the stage of the twentieth century, he would be Leopold Bloom. Such a view may seem too sophisticated, too much part of a world, in which the poet, or man of letters, has become so isolated from everything except literature, that there is something dubious about his claiming to have beliefs in the same sense as ordinary human beings might have them. One may suspect that the beliefs of poets who are also critics and who have made profoundly intellectual analyses of the effects of the world around them on their situations as poets may have been improvised to bolster up their own vocation. This is especially so, I think, when the poet appears to see nothing else in the sum of human progress than its undermining of the traditional positions of art.

But when one turns to writers like Gerard Manley Hopkins in whom faith seems undoubtedly more important than literary vocational self-interest, one sees the necessity of revolutionizing traditions in order to express faith in terms of modern life, as directly arising out of the need for expression. And in a poet like Wilfred Owen, in whom the human individuality predominates over the thought-out position of the strategic man of letters, one notes an irony towards the traditional view of poetry as beauty, which compares with that of Leopold Bloom being the incarnation of Ulysses in his modern Dublin setting.

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The idea of tradition as an explosive force, an unknown quantity almost, an apocalyptic mystery, something sought out from the past and chosen by the modern artist, perhaps in a spirit of grotesque mimicry, something disturbing and shocking, belongs to the early phase of modernism in poetry and fiction. In painting it still retains the enormous eclecticism of Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire,* the whole of visual art contained within the walls of the contemporary skull, and in one timeless moment. In an important paper on The Spirit of Modern Art (published in *The British Journal of Aesthetics,* Vol. I, No. 3, June 1961) J. P. Hodin, discussing the visual arts, offers a definition of the modern:

> Modern Art is cognition, the findings of which, often highly specialized and elaborated on an analytical basis, are organized into a new visual order. Linking up with a tradition of its own choice, of universal significance and without limitations in time and thus breaking with the chronological tradition generally acknowledged in art history, it strives for a synthesis in the work of the individual artist and through the mutual influence of its different trends upon one another; a many-faceted process moving towards a new unitary concept, a new artistic tonality, in other words, a style.

This definition would scarcely apply to poetry and criticism in the English language since the 1920's. It throws light on the breaking up of the once single modern movement into different tendencies in each art. One sees this process in Eliot's development. *The Waste Land* admits of a complete eclecticism in the choice of tradition. But with *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets* the choice has been narrowed to the Christian and, more specifically, to the English Church. Parallel with this, there is in Eliot's criticism, a corresponding narrowing down of the concept of tradition. When Eliot defended *Ulysses* and the earlier work of Ezra Pound, his concept of tradition surely extended to the pagan. He greatly admired Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and I surmise that he thought that whatever could be used as a myth was suitable as tradition.

In Yeats's *A Vision,* a book in which he considered that he had compiled the storehouse of symbols, myths and imagery for his poetry, there is also freedom of choice in tradition. And of course

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Pound, in the *Cantos,* is as eclectic as a painter like Picasso in his wide wandering over all history and all mythology.

Although the reputation of Yeats is unimpaired, and although Pound's cantos are vigorously defended, nevertheless the tendency of recent poetry and criticism is against the freedom of choice of tradition which Yeats, and Pound, and Joyce, and Eliot, in *The Waste Land,* shared with the painters and with Stravinsky. The modern painter, according to Mr. Hodin's account of what makes him modern, might be seen as asking himself "What tradition should I choose, that would best serve my purpose in inventing my own new style?" But the attitude which has more and more divided the poets from the painters is that poets have been influenced by critics to ask themselves "what tradition am I already *in*?" And the critics have also pressed upon them that the correct answer to this question is the answer discoverable to criticism. They have argued, against Mr. Hodin, that there is no such thing as freedom to choose a tradition which at the same time breaks with the "chronological tradition." There is—they have suggested—a choice between true tradition and no tradition. True tradition is that past which survives in a continuous—if very fragile—line into present life, so that if you apprehend it with critical intelligence, it can put you into contact with some pattern of living in the past. Thus it might be said that although we do not live in a Christian society, nevertheless, there is a lifeline of Christian tradition which will lead us back imaginatively and intelligently to true Christian communities. But, in this sense, there is no pagan tradition. There is just a pagan past.

The prevalent argument is more and more on the lines that so far from there being a freedom of choice among traditions, there are extremely few lifelines leading back into past traditions. From this there naturally follows the idea that there is only one true tradition anyway, and debate in America and England becomes more and more concentrated on discussing which is the true line of the tradition. The tradition is in the Church, say some. Others, embarrassed by the fact that it is difficult to agree to this without having to accept the Church's creed, argue that the tradition is in the "organic community," or New England, or the South; and since there is no question of being able to revive these communal patterns, they conclude that the tradition exists simply in the library of works

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written by the best writers who were privileged to belong to a place and time when the tradition flourished as actual living.

These lines of thought have disrupted, in literature, what was essentially modern: the vision of the present confronted by the past as a whole state of being. The vision of a whole modern world—a whole fatality—related to a past which is also whole, if only in not being modern, is, let me emphasize again, essentially the characteristic of the modern. As Rilke writes in the letter already cited: "We let it be emphasized again, in the sense of the Elegies WE are the transmuters of the earth; our whole existence here, the flights and falls of our love, all strengthen us for this task (besides which there is really no other)."

The connection of the idea of wholeness (the past as a whole, the task of the artist to interpret it into the wholeness of the present fatality) with freedom of choice to select any part of the past as tradition, should be apparent. The attitude of most recent critics to the traditional in the work of D. H. Lawrence, demonstrates the way in which a partial interpretation can be super-imposed on what, in the life and work of the writer himself, was the search for wholeness. F. R. Leavis, Richard Hoggart and others acclaim Lawrence as the great exemplar of the alternative tradition: the chapel-going, Bunyanesque, proletarian. In doing this they make him the champion of what is hopefully looked forward to as a new socialist puritan revolution, with roots in Cromwellian England, against the upper class public school Oxford and Cambridge and Bloomsbury culture.

It is of course quite possible to quote from *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and several of his essays to make him fit such a role. On the whole, Lawrence was probably more of a socialist than a Fascist or the blood-and-soil race-conscious Nazi whom Bertrand Russell saw in him. But even though the socialist and puritan working-class sentiments he sometimes expressed may prove that he was capable of playing the kind of part that is now being written out of his own books for him, in fact he refused it, even though he wrote some of its speeches. His actions and the greater part of his writing show that he was largely concerned with getting away from the very tradition which he is now being written (or analyzed) into. And those who put him back in this tradition have somehow to ignore the fact that he left Nottingham and England and wandered over

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the earth in search precisely of a tradition which he felt to be lacking as much among his "own" people as among the Bloomsbury intellectuals. Moreover the traditions—whether of Italian peasants, Etruscans, Aztec or pueblo Indians—of which he went in search were precisely those which, from the point of view of the literary sociologists who are concerned with establishing effective connections between past and present, were most illusory and useless.

The reason why Lawrence in fact refused the role now being thrust on him of leader of an English alternative tradition puritan revival is, surely, that he rejected the idea of being that kind of partisan. Although he was as much against the English upper class and the Oxbridge common rooms as any inmate of a Red Brick University common room could wish, he was not *for* Nottingham and the mines either. He had virtuous weaknesses which made partisan action impossible for him—a complete inability to co-operate with sociological types, and professors: above all a blind, hysterical hatred of industrial ugliness, and an utter unwillingness to work for any cause which had to deal in its terms. But the real objection is that he was, despite his contempt for all the literary sets, in the most essential respect a modern: that is to say, he saw contemporary civilization as a whole consciousness which would eventually engulf all the future and which already had only left in primitive civilizations those pockets of uncontemporary existence which he sought out. And in thinking that hope for the future could only begin by a change of consciousness occurring within the individual, and between individuals in their mutual spiritual and physical awareness, he was committing his trust to people who were points of consciousness of what had happened to the whole of civilization and who realized that the answer to this was also the total change of consciousness.

What I have described here as the revolutionary concept of tradition was, then, of fundamental importance to the modern movement, because it permitted creative minds to view the whole significant past of art at all times and places as an available tradition out of which modern forms and style might derive. The reversal to the idea of institutionalized or continuous tradition probably contributed more than any other cause to the collapse in literature of the modern movement. The difference between all that was what Hodin calls "a tradition of its own choice" and connected, institutionalized tradition,

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is apparent, I think in the gulf that separates *The Waste Land* from *Four Quartets*. It may well be that the change was, in literature, at all events, inevitable. All the same the price that is paid for the present reaction is the abandonment of the aim of representing a whole modern situation, which produced the greatest works of the modern movement: withdrawn into the limited fortified area that is the outpost of what remains of the continuous line of the tradition, poets turn away from the vast areas of the modern world where these connections no longer count, critics use the communicating lines as a means of getting back into the works of the past, and condemning all that is modern and unprecedented. Myth becomes split off from tradition, mere illustration for academic poems by academic poets. Inevitably, poetry seems as an art to have receded, and while painters digress into futurism, the most hopeful tendency in literature is the realism of novelists and playwrights oblivious of the aims that were modern, but at least contemporaries in the manner of Arnold Bennett, and energetic propagandists of an impassioned argument that they are in the line of the true tradition. In place of the upper class tradition—universally admitted to be in decline—they have in England set up their little standard of insularity.

Although the present reaction may be inevitable, it seems impossible that, on the premises now put forward by criticism and by novelists and playwrights content to be contemporaries in a limited social realist tradition, that work on the scale of the greatest achievements earlier in the century could be written. Re-consideration of the aims of the modern and an attempt to relate them to the most vigorous developments today, are surely necessary.

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Robert Lowell

SIX POEMS

NEW YORK 1962: FRAGMENT

(for E. H. L.)

This might be nature—twenty stories high,
two water tanks, tanned shingle, corsetted
by stapled pasture wire, while bed to bed,
we two, one cell here, lie
gazing into the ether's crystal ball,
sky and a sky, and sky, and sky, till death—
my heart stops . . .
This might be heaven. Years ago,
we aimed for less and settled for
a picture, out of style then and now in,
of seven daffodils. We watched them blow:
buttercup yellow were the flowers, and green
the stems as fresh paint, over them the wind,
the blousy wooden branches of the elms,
high summer in the breath that overwhelms
the termites digging in the underpinning . . .
Still over us, still in parenthesis,
this sack of hornets sopping up the flame,
still over us our breath,
sawing and pumping to the terminal,
and down below, we two, two in one waterdrop
vitalized by a needle drop of blood,
up, up, up, up and up,
soon shot, soon slugged into the overflow
that sets the wooden workhorse working here below.

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FALL 1961

Back and forth, back and forth,
goes the tock, tock, tock
of the orange, bland, ambassadorial
face of the moon
on the grandfather clock.

All autumn, the chafe and jar
of nuclear war;
we have talked our extinction to death.
I swim like a minnow
behind my studio window.

Our end drifts nearer,
the moon lifts,
radiant with terror.
The state
is a diver under a glass bell.

A father's no shield
for his child.
We are like a lot of wild
spiders crying together,
but without tears.

Nature holds up a mirror.
One swallow makes a summer.
It's easy to tick
off the minutes,
but the clockhands stick.

Back and forth!
Back and forth, back and forth—
my one point of rest
is the orange and black
oriole's swinging nest!

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THE OLD FLAME

My old flame, my wife!
Remember our lists of birds?
One morning last summer, I drove
by our house in Maine; it was still
on top of its hill—

now a red ear of Indian maize
was splashed on the door;
Old Glory with thirteen stars
hung on a pole; the clapboard
was old-red-schoolhouse-red.

Inside, a new landlord,
a new wife, a new broom!
Atlantic seaboard antique shop
pewter and plunder
shone in each room.

A new frontier!
No running next door
now to phone the sheriff
for his taxi to Bath
and the State Liquor Store!

No one saw your ghostly
imaginary lover
stare through the window,
and tighten
the scarf at his throat.

Health to the new people,
health to their flag, to their old
restored house on the hill!
Everything had been swept bare,
furnished, garnished and aired.

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Everything's changed for the best—
how quivering and fierce we were,
there snowbound together,
simmering like wasps
in our tent of books!

Poor ghost, old love, speak
with your old voice
of flaming insight
that kept us awake all night.
In one bed and apart,

we heard the plow
groaning up hill—
a red light, then a blue,
as it tossed off the snow
to the side of the road.

WATER

It was a Maine lobster town—
each morning boatloads of hands
pushed off for granite
quarries on the islands,

and left dozens of bleak
white frame houses stuck
like oyster shells
on a hill of rock,

and below us, the sea lapped
the raw little match-stick
mazes of a weir,
where the fish for bait were trapped.

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Remember? We sat on a slab of rock.
From this distance in time,
it seems the color
of iris, rotting and turning purpler,

but it was only
the usual gray rock
turning the usual green
when drenched by the sea.

The sea drenched the rock
at our feet all day,
and kept tearing away
flake after flake.

One night you dreamed
you were a mermaid clinging to a wharf-pile,
and trying to pull
off the barnacles with your hands.

We wished our two souls
might return like gulls
to the rock. In the end,
the water was too cold for us.

FLORENCE

(*For Mary McCarthy*)

I long for the black ink,
cuttlefish, April, Communists
and brothels of Florence—
everything, even the British
fairies who haunted the hills,
even the chills and fever
that came one a month

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and forced me to think.
The apple was more human there than here,
but it took a long time for the blinding
golden rind to mellow.

How vulnerable the horseshoe crabs
dredging the bottom like flat-irons
in their antique armor,
with their sword grass black bone tails,
made for a child to grab
and throw strangling ashore!

Oh Florence, Florence, patroness
of the lovely tyrannicides
Where the tower of the Old Palace
pierces the sky
like a hypodermic needle,
Perseus, David and Judith,
lords and ladies of the Blood,
Greek demi-gods of the Cross,
rise sword in hand
above the unshaven,
formless decapitation
of the monsters, tubs of guts,
mortifying chunks for the pack.
Pity the monsters!
Pity the monsters!
Perhaps, one always took the wrong side—
Ah, to have known, to have loved
too many Davids and Judiths!
My heart bleeds black blood for the monster.
I have seen the Gorgon.
The erotic terror
of her helpless, big bosomed body
lay like slop.
Wall-eyed, staring the despot to stone,
her severed head swung
like a lantern in the victor's hand.

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MIDDLE AGE

Now the midwinter grind
is on me, New York
drills through my nerves,
as I walk
the chewed-up streets.

At forty-five,
what next, what next?
At every corner,
I meet my Father,
my age, still alive.

Father, forgive me
my injuries,
as I forgive
those I
have injured!

You never climbed
Mount Sion, yet left
dinosaur
death-steps on the crust,
where I must walk.

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Alfred Kazin

SONS, LOVERS AND MOTHERS

Sons and Lovers was published fifty years ago. In these fifty years how many autobiographical novels have been written by young men about the mothers they loved too well, about their difficulties in "adjusting" to other women, and about themselves as the sensitive writers-to-be who liberated themselves just in time in order to write their first novel? Such autobiographical novels—psychological devices they usually are, written in order to demonstrate freedom from the all-too-beloved mother—are one of the great symbols of our time. They are rooted in the modern emancipation of women. Lawrence himself, after a return visit in the 1920's to his native Nottinghamshire, lamented that the "wildness" of his father's generation was gone, that the dutiful sons in his own generation now made "good" husbands. Even working-class mothers in England, in the last of the Victorian age, had aimed at a "higher" standard of culture, and despising their husbands and concentrating on their sons, they had made these sons images of themselves. These mothers had sought a new dignity and even a potential freedom for themselves as women, but holding their sons too close, they robbed them of their necessary "wildness" and masculine force. So the sons grew up in bondage to their mothers, and the more ambitious culturally these sons were—Frank O'Connor says that *Sons and Lovers* is the work of "one of the New Men who are largely a creation of the Education Act of 1870"—the more likely they were to try for their emancipation by writing a novel. The cultural aspiration that explains their plight was expected to turn them into novelists.

Sons and Lovers (which is not a first novel) seems easy to

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imitate. One reason, apart from the relationships involved, is the very directness and surface conventionality of its technique. James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man,* published only three years after *Sons and Lovers,* takes us immediately into the "new" novel of the twentieth century. It opens on a bewildering series of images faithful to the unconsciousness of childhood. Proust, who brought out the first volume of his great novel, *A la recherche du temps perdu,* in the same year that Lawrence published *Sons and Lovers,* imposed so highly stylized a unity of mood on the "Ouverture" to *Du côté de chez Swann,* that these impressions of childhod read as if they had been reconstructed to make a dream. But *Sons and Lovers* opens as a nineteenth-century novel with a matter-of-fact description of the setting—the mine, the landscape of "Bestwood," the neighboring streets and houses. This opening could have been written by Arnold Bennett, or any other of the excellent "realists" of the period whose work does not summon up, fifty years later, the ecstasy of imagination that Lawrence's work, along with that of Joyce and Proust, does provide to us. Lawrence is writing close to the actual facts. In his old-fashioned way he is even writing *about* the actual facts. No wonder that a young novelist with nothing but *his* own experiences to start him off may feel that Lawrence's example represents the triumph of experience. Literature has no rites in *Sons and Lovers;* everything follows as if from memory alone. When the struggle begins that makes the novel—the universal modern story of a "refined" and discontented woman who pours out on her sons the love she refuses the husband too "common" for her—the equally universal young novelist to whom all this has happened, the novelist who in our times is likely to have been all too mothered and fatherless, cannot help saying to himself—"Why can't I write this good a novel out of myself? Haven't I suffered as much as D. H. Lawrence and am I not just as sensitive? And isn't this a highly selective age in which 'sensitive' writers count?"

But the most striking thing about Lawrence—as it is about Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*—is his sense of his own authority. Though he was certainly not saved from atrocious suffering in relation to his mother, Lawrence's "sensitivity" was in the main concerned with reaching the highest and widest possible consciousness of everything —"nature," family, society, books—that came within his experience

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as a human being. His sense of his own powers, of himself as a "medium" through which the real life in things could be discovered for other people, was so strong that his personal vividness stayed with his earliest friends as a reminder of the best hopes of their youth; it was instantly recognized by literary people in London when they read his work. You can easily dislike Lawrence for this air of authority, just as many people dislike him for the influence that he exerted during his lifetime and that has grown steadily since his death in 1930. There is already an unmistakeable priggish conceit about Paul Morel in this novel. Here is a miner's son who is asked by his mother if his is a "divine discontent" and replies in this style: "Yes, I don't care about its divinity. But damn your happiness! So long as life's full, it doesn't matter whether it's happy or not. I'm afraid your happiness would bore me." But even this contains Lawrence's sense of his own authority. He saw his talent as a sacred possession—he was almost too proud to think of his career as a *literary* one. This sense of having a power that makes for righteousness—this was so strong in Lawrence, and so intimately associated with his mother's influence, that the struggle he describes in *Sons and Lovers,* the struggle to love another woman as he had loved his mother, must be seen as the connection he made between his magic "demon," his gift, and his relationship to his mother.

Freud once wrote that he who is a favorite of the mother becomes a "conqueror." This was certainly Freud's own feeling about himself. The discoverer of the Oedipus complex never doubted that the attachment which, abnormally protracted, makes a son feel that loving any woman but his mother is a "desecration," nevertheless, in its early prime features, gives a particular kind of strength to the son. It is a spiritual strength, not the masculine "wildness" that Lawrence was to miss in contemporary life. Lawrence's own feeling that he was certainly somebody, the pride that was to sustain him despite horribly damaged lungs through so many years of tuberculosis until his death at forty-five; the pride that carried him so far from a miner's cottage; the pride that enabled him, a penniless schoolteacher, to run off with a German baronness married to his old teacher and to make her give up her three children; the pride that thirty years after his death still makes him so vivid to us as we read—this pride

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had not its origin but its *setting,* in the fierce love of Mrs. Arthur Lawrence for "Bert," of Mrs. Morel for her Paul.

Lawrence, who was so full of his own gift, so fully engaged in working it out that he would not acknowledge his gifted contemporaries, certainly did feel that the "essential soul" of him as he would have said, his special demon, his particular gift of vision, his particular claim on immortality, was bound up with his mother. Not "love" in the psychological sense of conscious consideration, but love in the mythological sense of a sacred connection, was what Lawrence associated with his mother and Paul with Mrs. Morel. Lawrence's power over others is directly traceable to his own sense of the sacredness still possible to life, arising from the powers hidden in ordinary human relationships. The influence he had—if only temporarily—even on a rationalist like Bertrand Russell reminds one of the hold he kept on socialist working-class people he had grown up with and who certainly did not share Lawrence's exalted individualism. Lawrence's "authority," which made him seem unbearably full of himself to those who disliked him, was certainly of a very singular kind. He had an implicit confidence in his views on many questions—on politics as on sex and love; he was able to pontificate in later life about the Etruscans, of whom he knew nothing, as well as to talk dangerous nonsense about "knowing through the blood" and the leader principle. Yet it is Lawrence's struggle to retain all the moral authority that he identified with his mother's love that explains the intensity of *Sons and Lovers,* as it does the particular intensity of Lawrence's style in this book, which he later criticized as too violent. Yet behind this style lies Lawrence's lifelong belief in what he called "quickness," his need to see the "shimmer," the life force in everything, as opposed to the "dead crust" of its external form. Destiny for Lawrence meant his privileged and constant sense of the holiness implicit in this recognition of the life force. Destiny also meant his recognition, as a delicate boy who had already seen his older brother Ernest (the "William" of *Sons and Lovers*) sicken and die of the struggle to attach himself to another woman, that his survival was somehow bound up with fidelity to his mother. Lawrence had absolute faith in his gift, but it was bound up with his physical existence, which was always on trial. He felt that it was in his mother's hands. The gift of life, so particularly precious to him after his near-fatal pneu-

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monia at seventeen (when his brother died), could be easily lost.

With so much at stake, Lawrence put into ultimate terms, life or death, the struggle between Paul Morel's need to hold onto his mother and his desire to love Miriam Leivers as well. The struggle in *Sons and Lovers* is not between love of the mother and love of a young woman; it is the hero's struggle to *keep* the mother as his special strength, never to lose her, not to offend or even to vex her by showing too much partiality to other women. This is why the original of "Miriam Leivers," Jessie Chambers, says in her touching memoir (*D. H. Lawrence*: *A Personal Record*: by "E. T.") that she had to break with Lawrence after she had seen the final draft of the book, that "the shock of *Sons and Lovers* gave the death-blow to our friendship," for in that book "Lawrence handed his mother the laurels of victory."

That is indeed what Lawrence did; it would not have occurred to him to do anything else. And Jessie Chambers also honestly felt that she minded this for Lawrence's sake, not her own, since by this time there was no longer any question of marriage between them. Jessie, who certainly loved Lawrence for his genius even after she had relinquished all personal claim on him, had launched Lawrence's career by sending out his poems. When Lawrence, after his mother's death, wrote a first draft of *Sons and Lovers,* he was still unable to work out his situation in a novel. Jessie encouraged him to drop this unsatisfactory version of the later novel and to portray the emotional struggle directly. At his request, she even wrote out narrative sections which Lawrence revised and incorporated into his novel. (Lawrence often had women write out passages for his novels when he wanted to know how a woman would react to a particular situation; Frieda Lawrence was to contribute to his characterization of Mrs. Morel.) Lawrence sent Jessie parts of the manuscript for her comments and further notes. After so much help and even collaboration, Jessie felt betrayed by the book. Lawrence had failed to show, she said, how important a role the girl had played in the development of the young man as an artist. "It was his old inability to face his problem squarely. His mother had to be supreme, and for the sake of that supremacy every disloyalty was permissible."

Lawrence is quoted in Harry T. Moore's biography, *The Intelligent Heart,* as saying of Miriam-Jessie, she "encouraged my demon.

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But alas, it was me, not he, whom she loved. So for her too it was a catastrophe. My demon is not easily loved: whereas the ordinary me is. So poor Miriam was let down." Lawrence's tone is exalted, but he certainly justified himself in *Sons and Lovers* as a novelist, not as a "son." That is the only consideration now. Jessie Chambers herself became an embittered woman. She tried to find her salvation in politics, where the fierce hopes of her generation before 1914 for a new England were certainly not fulfilled. But Lawrence, taking the new draft of *Sons and Lovers* with him to finish in Germany after he had run off with Frieda, was able, if not to "liberate" himself from his mother in his novel, to write a great novel out of his earliest life and struggles.

That is the triumph Jessie Chambers would not acknowledge in *Sons and Lovers,* this she could not see—the Lawrence "unable to face his problem squarely" made a great novel out of the "problem," out of his mother, father, brother, the miners, the village, the youthful sweetheart. Whatever Jessie may have thought from being too close to Lawrence himself, whatever Lawrence may have said about his personal struggles during the six-week frenzy in which he launched the new draft, Lawrence felt his "problem" not as something to be solved, but as a subject to be represented. All these early experiences weighed on him with a pressure that he was able to communicate—later he called it "that hard violent style full of sensation and presentation." Jessie Chambers herself described Lawrence's accomplishment when she said, speaking of the new draft of *Sons and Lovers* that she drove Lawrence to write, "It was his power to transmute the common experiences into significance that I always felt to be Lawrence's greatest gift. He did not distinguish between small and great happenings. The common round was full of mystery, awaiting interpretation. Born and bred of working people, he had the rare gift of seeing them from within, and revealing them on their own plane."

Lawrence's particular gift was this ability to represent as valuable anything that came his way. He had the essential religious attribute of *valuing* life, of seeing the most trivial things as a kind of consecration. In part, at least, one can trace this to the poverty, austerity and simplicity of his upbringing. Jessie Chambers once watched Lawrence and his father gathering watercress for tea. "Words cannot convey

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Lawrence's brimming delight in all these simple things." Delight in simple things is one of the recurring features of the working-class existence described in *Sons and Lovers*. We can understand better the special value that Lawrence identified with his mother's laboriousness and self-denial in the scene where Mrs. Morel, wickedly extravagant, comes home clutching the pot that cost her fivepence and the bunch of pansies and daisies that cost her fourpence. The rapture of the commonest enjoyments and simplest possessions is represented in the mother and father as well as in the young artist Paul, the future D. H. Lawrence. This autobiographical novel rooted in the writer's early struggles is charged with feeling for his class, his region, his people. Lawrence was not a workingman himself, despite the brief experience in the surgical appliances factory that in the novel becomes Paul Morel's continued job. Chekhov said that the working-class writer purchases with his youth that which a more genteel writer is born with. But Lawrence gained everything, as a writer, from being brought up in the working class, and lost nothing by it. In *Sons and Lovers* he portrays the miners without idealizing them, as a socialist would; he relishes their human qualities (perhaps even a little jealously) and works them up as a subject for his art. He does not identify himself with them; his mother, too, we can be sure from the portrait of Mrs. Morel, tended to be somewhat aloof among the miners' wives. But Lawrence knows *as a writer* that he is related to working people, that he is bound up with them in the same order of physical and intimate existence, that it is workers' lives he has always looked on. Some of the most affecting passages in this novel are based on the force and directness of working-class speech. " 'E's niver gone, child?" Morel says to his son when William dies. Paul answers in "educated" and even prissy English, but the voice of the mines, the fields and the kitchens is rendered straight and unashamed. Lawrence, who knew how much he had lost as a man by siding with his mother in the conflict, describes the miner Morel getting his own breakfast, sitting "down to an hour of joy," with an irresistible appreciation of the physical and human picture involved: "He toasted his bacon on a fork and caught the drops of fat on his bread; then he put the rasher on his thick slice of bread, and cut off chunks with a clasp-knife, poured his tea into his saucer, and was happy."

The writer alone in Lawrence redeemed the weaknesses of being

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too much his mother's son. We see the common round of life among the miners' families very much as the young Lawrence must have seen it, with the same peculiar directness. His mental world was startlingly without superfluities and wasted motions. What he wrote, he wrote. The striking sense of authority, of inner conviction, that he associated with his mother's love gave him a cutting briskness with things he disapproved. But this same immediacy of response, when it touched what he loved, could reach the greatest emotional depths. The description of William Morel's coffin being carried into the house is a particular example of this. "The coffin swayed, the men began to mount the three steps with their load. Annie's candle flickered, and she whimpered as the first men appeared, and the limbs and bowed heads of six men struggled to climb into the room, bearing the coffin that rode like sorrow on their living flesh." Lawrence's power to move the reader lies in this ability to summon up all the physical attributes associated with an object; he puts you into direct contact with all its properties *as* an object. Rarely has the realistic novelist's need to *present,* to present vividly, continually, and at the highest pitch of pictorial concentration—the gift which has made the novel the supreme literary form of modern times—rarely has this reached such intense clarity of representation as it does in *Sons and Lovers.* There are passages, as in Tolstoy, that make you realize what a loss to directness of vision our increasing self-consciousness in literature represents. Lawrence is still face to face with life, and he can describe the smallest things with the most attentive love and respect.

Lawrence does not describe, he would not attempt to describe, the object as in *itself* it really is. The effect of his prose is always to heighten our consciousness of something, to relate it to ourselves. He is a romantic—and in this book is concerned with the most romantic possible subject for a novelist, the growth of the writer's own consciousness. Yet he succeeded as a novelist, he succeeded brilliantly, because he was convinced that the novel is the great literary form, for no other could reproduce so much of the actual motion or "shimmer" of life, especially as expressed in the relationships between people. Since for Lawrence the great subject of literature was not the writer's own consciousness but consciousness between people, the living felt relationship between them, it was his very

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concern to represent the "shimmer" of life, the "wholeness"—these could have been mere romantic slogans—that made possible his brilliance as a novelist. He was to say, in a remarkable essay called "Why The Novel Matters," that "Only in the novel are *all* things given full play, or at least, they may be given full play, when we realize that life itself, and not inert safety, is the reason for living. For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing that is anything, the wholeness of a man, the wholeness of a woman, man alive, and live woman." It was *relationship* that was sacred to him, as it was the relationships *with* his mother, her continuing presence in his mind and life, that gave him the sense of authority on which all his power rested. And as a novelist in *Sons and Lovers* he was able to rise above every conventional pitfall in an autobiographical novel by centering his whole vision on character as the focus of a relationship, not as an absolute.

After *Sons and Lovers,* which was his attempt to close up the past, Lawrence was to move on to novels like *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women In Love* (1920), where the "non-human in humanity" was to be more important to him than "the old-fashioned human element." The First World War was to make impossible for Lawrence his belief in the old "stable ego" of character. Relationships, as the continuing interest of life, became in these more "problematical," less "conventional" novels, a version of man's general relationship, as an unknown in himself, to his unexplained universe. But the emphasis on growth and change in *Sons and Lovers,* the great book that closes Lawrence's first period, is from the known to the unknown; as Frank O'Connor has said, the book begins as a nineteenth century novel and turns into a twentieth century one. Where autobiographical novels with a "sensitive" artist or novelist as hero tend to emphasize the hero's growth to self-knowledge, the history of his "development," the striking thing about *Sons and Lovers,* and an instance of the creative mind behind it, is that it does not hand the "laurels of victory" to the hero. It does not allow him any self-sufficient victory over his circumstances. With the greatest possible vividness it shows Paul Morel engulfed in relationships—with the mother he loves all too sufficiently, with the "spiritual" Miriam and Clara, neither of whom he can love whole-heartedly—relationships that are difficult and pain-

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ful, and that Lawrence leaves arrested in their pain and conflict. When Jessie Chambers said of the first draft of *Sons and Lovers* that "Lawrence had carried the situation to the point of deadlock and had stopped there," she may have been right enough about it as an aborted novel. But Lawrence's primary interest and concern as a novelist, his sense of the continuing *flow* of relationship between people, no matter how unclear and painful, no matter how far away it was from the "solution" that the people themselves may have longed for, is what makes this whole last section of the novel so telling.

But of course it is the opening half of *Sons and Lovers* that makes the book great. The struggle between husband and wife is described with a direct, unflinching power. Lawrence does not try to bring anything to a psychological conclusion. The marriage is a struggle, a continuing friction, a relationship where the wife's old desire for her husband can still flash up through her resentment of his "lowness." That is why everything in the "common round" can be described with such tenderness, for the relationship of husband and wife sweeps into its unconscious passion everything that the young Lawrence loved, and was attached to. Living in a mining village on the edge of old Sherwood Forest, always close to the country, Lawrence was as intimate with nature as any country poet could have been, but he was lucky to see rural England and the industrial Midlands in relation to each other; the country soothed his senses, but a job all day long in a Nottingham factory making out orders for surgical appliances did not encourage nature worship. "On the fallow land the young wheat shone silkily. Minton pit waved its plumes of white steam, coughed, and rattled hoarsely." Lawrence is a great novelist of landscape, for he is concerned with the relationships of people living on farms, or walking out into the country after the week's work in the city. He does not romantitcize nature, he describes it in its minute vibrations. In *Sons and Lovers* the emotional effect of the "lyrical" passages depends on Lawrence's extraordinary ability to convey movement and meaning even in non-human things. But in this book nature never provides evasion of human conflict and is not even a projection of human feelings; it is the physical world that Lawrence grew up in, and includes the pit down which a miner must go every day. Paul in convalescence, sitting up in bed, would "see the fluffy horses feeding

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at the troughs in the field, scattering their hay on the trodden yellow snow; watch the miners troop home—small, black figures trailing slowly in gangs across the white field."

This miniature, exquisite as a Japanese watercolor, is typical of *Sons and Lovers*—the country lives and seethes, but it has no mystical value. It is the landscape of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and in the book it is still what it was to Lawrence growing up in it, an oasis of refreshment in an industrial world. The countryside arouses young lovers to their buried feelings and it supplies images for the "quickness," the vital current of relationship, that Lawrence valued most in life. It is never sacred in itself. When you consider that this novel came out in 1913, at the height of the "Georgian" period, when so many young poets of Lawrence's generation were mooning over nature, it is striking that *his* chief interest is always the irreducible ambiguity of human relationships. Lawrence's language, in certain key scenes, certainly recalls the emotional inflation of fiction in the "romantic" heyday preceding the First World War. But the style is actually exalted rather than literary. There is an unmistakably scriptural quality to Lawrence's communication of extreme human feeling. Mr. Morel secretly cut young William's hair, and Mrs. Morel feels that "this act of masculine clumsiness was the spear through the side of her love." The Lawrences were Congregationalist, like American Puritans. They were close to the Lord. The strong sense of himself that Lawrence was always to have, the conviction that what he felt was always terribly important just in the way he felt it, is imparted to Mrs. Morel herself in the great scene in which the insulted husband, dizzy with drink, locks her out of the house. The description of Mrs. Morel's feelings is charged with a kind of frenzy of concern for her; the language sweeps from pole to pole of feeling. Mrs. Morel is pregnant, and her sense of her moral aloneness at this moment is overwhelming. "Mrs. Morel, seared with passion, shivered to find herself out there in a great white light, that fell cold on her, and gave a shock to her inflamed soul." Later we read that "After a time the child, too, melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon."

In this key scene of the mother's "trouble" (which must have

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been based on things that Lawrence later heard from his mother), the sense we get of Mrs. Morel, humiliated and enraged but in her innermost being haughtily inviolate, gives us a sense of all the power that Lawrence connected with his mother and of the power in the relationship that flowed between them. In *Sons and Lovers* he was able to re-create, for all time, the moment when the sympathetic bond between them reached its greatest intensity—and the moment when her death broke it. Ever after, Lawrence was to try to re-create this living bond, this magic sympathy, between himself and life. He often succeeded in creating an exciting and fruitful version of it—in relationship to his extraordinary wife Frieda; to a host of friends, disciples, admirers and readers throughout the world; even to his own novels and stories, essays and articles and poems and letters. Unlike Henry James, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, T. S. Eliot, Lawrence always makes you feel that not art but the quality of the lived experience is his greatest concern. That is why it is impossible to pick up anything by him without feeling revivified. Never were a writer's works more truly an allegory of his life, and no other writer of his imaginative standing has in our time written books that are so open to life. Yet one always feels in Lawrence his own vexation and disappointment at not being able to reproduce, in the full consciousness of his genius, the mutual sympathy he had experienced with his mother. One even feels about Lawrence's increasing vexation and disappointment that it tore him apart physically, exhausted and shattered him. Wandering feverishly from continent to continent, increasingly irritable and vulnerable to every human defect and cultural complacency, he seems finally to have died for lack of another place to aim at; for lack, even, of another great fight to wage. His work itself was curiously never enough for him, for he could write so quickly, sitting anywhere under a tree, that the book seemed to fly out of his hand as soon as he had made it; and he was so much the only poet in his imaginative universe that he could not take other writers seriously enough to rejoice in his own greatness. He was searching, one feels, for something infinitely more intangible than fame, or a single person, or a "God"—he was searching for the remembered ecstasy of experience, the quality of feeling, that is even more evanescent than the people we connect with it. Lawrence kept looking for this even after he had

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reproduced it in *Sons and Lovers,* whose triumph as art was to give him so little lasting satisfaction. Art could not fulfill Lawrence's search, and only death could end it. But the ecstasy of a single human relationship that he tried to reproduce never congealed into a single image or idol or belief. Imaginatively, Lawrence was free; which is why his work could literally rise like a phoenix out of the man who consumed himself in his conflict with himself.

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Norman Birnbaum

THE COMING END OF ANTI-COMMUNISM

The recent *Partisan Review* symposium on "The Cold War and the Future of the West" is just one striking piece of evidence for a change of mind among the Western intellectuals. Anti-Communism, as a basic and comprehensive view of the world, is on its way out. Things were said in the symposium which could not have been said in *PR*—or, at any rate, *were* not said in *PR*—ten or even five years ago. The American case, it is true, is rather special: the decline of anti-Communism among the intellectuals has been accompanied by a recrudescence of a popular anti-Communism which has assumed forms far more malignant than McCarthyism. This has reinforced (and may well have been reinforced by) the increasingly open scepticism of the intellectuals as to the value and probable results of the prosecution of the cold war. In Europe and elsewhere, of course, the intellectuals unwilling to subscribe any longer to militant anti-Communism simply articulate what millions of others think. (The German Federal Republic, where the intellectuals criticize government policy and the public does not, seems to resemble the United States. There is, however, this difference: the Germans are terrified at the prospect of a war, and on this point American popular imagination is defective.) The situation is fluid, but not entirely opaque; it is surprising that some of those who not too many years ago announced the "end of ideology" have as yet to deal with this new development. A sketch of the anatomy of the growing revulsion for anti-Communism, therefore, seems appropriate; at the least, it may show how arguments in New York are (after all) part of a world historical process.

The crisis of the ideology of anti-Communism reflects the crisis of anti-Communism as a political system; in the end, it may well intensify it. Since 1946 political energies in the West (which is to say, ultimately, *moral* energies) have been concentrated on the defense of those institutions and the maintenance of those forces which were

Editor's Note: This article is part of PR's discussion on the problems of the cold war and the future of the West. Comment is invited.

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thought capable of resisting revolutionary changes—lest the Communist movement use the changes to seize power. In the West, anti-Communism as a political system has entailed a constriction and rationalization of politics in the pluralistic and democratic societies—with the result that pluralism has been diminished and democracy has taken on an increasingly formal content. In the less liberal sectors of the West, and above all in the non-Western areas subject to Western political domination or influence, the anti-Communist system attempted to consolidate all those forces which promised to maximize a repressive anti-Communism. However, the *lacunae,* flaws, and contradictions of the anti-Communist system appear to be undermining it at a rate which cannot be overcome by the increasingly slipshod efforts to repair it. A flexible anti-Communism, theoretically attractive, seems practically impossible. The disintegration of the anti-Communist ideology, confronted with a situation which escapes definition (let alone control), must continue.

Perhaps it is inaccurate to suggest that the situation escapes definition, more precise to assert that the available definitions won't fit. The anti-Communist ideology provided the ideal justification for a system whose fundaments were exceedingly material: the frenetic prosperity of the West, the American nuclear panoply and Western arms generally, the singular combination of the old and new elites exploiting those parts of the world under Western political tutelage. The very grossness of anti-Communism as a political system seems to have required a surpassing spiritualization of its image of the enemy: Communism has been depicted in terms almost exclusively ideological or psychological.

Communism as the systematic embodiment of political non-value, Communists as either cynical manipulators of ideological catch-phrases or blinded servitors of some absurd conception of historical process and of an inhuman but highly simplified and self-confirming morality, the Communist movements as a pseudo-fraternity and Communist society as a pseudo-community—these are some of the emphases of the ideology of anti-Communism. The propositions that Communism depends upon the self-deception of the Communists and on their explicit deception of others have been fused. What is now at issue is not the validity of these judgments but the manner in which they have been promulgated. These ideological attributes of Communism, and the motives held attached to them, have been depicted as the essential elements in the structure of Communism—sometimes as not only essential, but as ahistoric and demonic tendencies manifested in history. Constraint, compulsion, force and terror have been curiously under-

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emphasized in these versions of anti-Communism, treated as epiphenomena derived from Communism's underlying psychic structure—if inevitable results of it. The ideology of anti-Communism, indeed, insists on the pathologically exaggerated role of ideology in Communism itself (as if the anti-Communists alone were super-sober).

It may be objected, not without reason, that anti-Communism as a political system has no essence, that there are as many anti-Communisms as there are anti-Communist groupings, and that Communism has something in it (or something which can be plausibly ascribed to it) for every man's aversions. The American Right does not object to Soviet Communism because of its manifest failure to have developed democratic socialism but because of the absurd belief that it may well have succeeded. Less primitively, and rather more intelligently, an American intellectual some months ago said that for him the worst thing about Communism was that it *did* effect a measure of social reform, making it more difficult to combat its more negative features. The many sources and types of practical anti-Communism, however, do utilize an ideology of anti-Communism fashioned by the intellectuals. When and if the intellectuals cease to provide it, they will be subject to reprisals by those who need it—but they will have deprived the latter of something of value. It is, therefore, with the intellectuals' response to Communism and with the forces shaping it, that this essay is chiefly concerned.

First things first: the most important single recent contribution to the end of anti-Communism has been the crisis in Communism itself. While some object to Communist ideology, and others to Communist practice, some to Communist movements and others to Communist societies—no anti-Communist has been unaffected by the conflicts and controversies now dividing Communism itself. The increase in heresies and schisms, the obvious pressures of differing material and ideological interest groups in Communist societies upon the Communist states, the acknowledgement of a part of the truth by accomplished official liars, and the subsequent incorporation of the discrepancy between Communist ideology and Communist practice in the official consciousness of Communism (and, therewith, the legitimation of those tendencies in public opinion in Communist countries which were always preoccupied with the discrepancy)—these have forcibly altered monolithic conceptions of Communism. Those, indeed, who sought to interpret Communism as an instance of some larger historical category —totalitarianism—have been forced to revise their earlier judgments on the irreversibility of totalitarian processes.

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The crisis in Communism has been accompanied by an insistence by Communist intellectuals on the anti-authoritarian, democratic and fraternal elements in the Communist tradition. They have taken risks to make their views known—risks rather more serious than the loss of posts or preferment. A spiritual community has developed, often amongst men and women who have never met; there are now many in the West who are prepared to accept the dissident Communists as fellows—despite the fact that these remain Communists. Quite apart from the differing views held by Westerners as to the incidence and possibilities of de-Stalinization in Communist society, it is hardly possible any longer to depict Communist society as unredeemably black.

Some of the consequences of the crisis for anti-Communism merit examination in greater detail. In 1956, Sartre said that de-Stalinization would eventually de-Stalinize the de-Stalinizers. Khrushchev's extraordinary performance at the Twenty-second Congress suggests that de-Stalinization, while not necessarily an irreversible process, is one which is difficult to stop. A good deal of attention has been given to the motives of the anti-Stalinist ex-Stalinists, rather less to the extent to which in the Soviet Union itself the process may well escape their control. The mobilization of sentiment against the Stalinist elements in the Party involves a recourse to popular opinion as well. The explosions of 1953 in Germany and 1956 in Hungary and Poland cannot repeat themselves in the U.S.S.R.: the factor of national protest is missing. Yet there is no reason to suppose that the process of de-Stalinization can be confined to the Party and to the intelligentsia, with only occasional mutterings amongst the people. The notion, entertained by some, of a relatively peaceful de-Stalinization to be accomplished by (partial) concessions from above, in response to (limited) pressures from below, is nonsense. If a genuine opposition emerges in the Soviet Union, it will define itself through conflict. There will be strikes, demonstrations, violence in the Soviet Union before the process can be completed. The very possibility of such conflict, which need on no account pre-suppose an internal attack on Soviet Communism but rather contradictory interpretations of Communist legitimacy, has diminished the intellectual respectability of those sorts of anti-Communism which insist upon the impossibility of open political conflict in Communist states. More, the thesis of limited and controlled de-Stalinization rests on a view of Soviet society as so bureaucratized that no direct expressions of dissent can be expected —a view which, to some extent, may reflect a projective judgment on Western society itself.

The conflict between the Soviet and Chinese Communist parties,

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despite its many negative and dangerous aspects, can accelerate not alone the development of polycentrism in the Communist movement as a whole but of democratization within individual parties and states. The leadership of the C.P.S.U., in its conflict with the Maoists, has appealed to Soviet public opinion; evoked in this context, opinion may not readily abdicate once again. The episode of the "Hundred Flowers" in China, did have a tragic (and savage) outcome, but it suggests that Maoism itself is not a rigidly fixed system. The margin of error and for miscalculation in world politics is, of course, terrifyingly small: Chinese adventurism may well precipitate a catastrophe. Is there, however, any reason to doubt that there is some awareness of this inside the Chinese C.P. itself—or that, under certain circumstances (not least, a remission of American pressure) it can lead to a change in Chinese policy? In any case, awareness of this danger inside the Communist movement as a whole is acute—with all that this implies for the open expression of ideological conflict within it.

Meanwhile, the view that the Soviet Union is entering a "conservative" ideological phase and that China will serve as a model to the under-developed countries is not entirely convincing. The Soviet Union will have demonstrated its capacity to industrialize while China is in the middle of the process. The critique of Stalinism may lead the Soviet Union to proclaim part of the price paid for its own industrialization as excessive and unnecessary. As the U.S.S.R. and not China will be able to aid the under-developed countries, its political influence upon them will hardly diminish. Further, the term "conservative" can be applied to the Soviet Union only by extending analogy improbably. The social processes that launched the C.P.S.U. upon de-Stalinization will not easily be contained within a "conservative" political formula. In any case, the notion that the future belongs to Maoism, in the new states, systematically under-estimates the (relatively) libertarian components in the ideology of their political elites. The influence of Yugoslavia, entirely disproportionate to its size, attests the eagerness with which large parts of the world greet deviant or heretical variants of Communism.

There is also at least one possibility of new developments in Western European Communism. In Italy, the opening to the Left attempted by the Christian Democrats has strengthened the strong revisionist faction inside the Italian C.P. Designed to isolate the C.P. from the Italian Socialist Party, the Christian Democratic move may well begin a process in Italian politics which has the opposite effect. By legitimating collaboration with a Marxist party not subservient to

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Moscow, the Christian Democrats have provided a useful argument for those Communists who wish to change their Party's relationship to the Soviet Union. The way is now open for the development of an indigenous Italian Communism which may well prove of considerable political appeal; it is remarkable that the recent polemics within the P.C.I. have been accompanied by net electoral gains. A sophisticated Communist attempt to cope with the problems of Italian economic and social development will have interesting effects on Western opinion elsewhere, and will certainly render Communist polycentrism impossible of containment within its current limits. Of course, all of this has as yet to occur; the fact, however, that it can be discussed as a possibility is in itself a contribution to the erosion of anti-Communism.

Recent changes within Communism have coincided with the ascent of a new Western generation, for whom Communism means not simply Stalin but Tito, Gomulka, Nagy, Kolakowski, and Evtushenko. The new generation's spiritual distance from the horrors of the recent past may indeed constitute a source of distortion in its political judgments. It is, however, able to approach a new situation in a new way. I have said that dissent within Communism has encouraged a Western sense of affinity with the dissenters. Intellectuals within the two camps are discovering (or re-discovering) their common distrust of the spiritual pretensions of political authority, their common (and increasing) scepticism towards schematic interpretations of history as forms of moral judgment, a joint desire for more complex types of personal moral engagement, a shared perception of the absurd, the grotesque and the unjust in bureaucracy, and an insistence on measuring institutions by a human standard which can fairly be termed transcendent. It is the young who are everywhere prominent. The younger intellectuals in Communist societies have used Western social criticism to attack their own enemies. The young in the West have seen that anti-Communism has led their elders into spiritual sterility and political impotence. The alterations in both Communism and anti-Communism, then, are not simply connected; a change of generations is an important element in each.

I have said that the internal transformation of Communism (potential as well as actual) is the single most important recent cause of the disintegration of anti-Communism. Perhaps, however, this is inaccurate. The sheer animal fear of a catastrophe is now a world political factor of primary importance. The fact that in *Partisan Review* some contributors could declare that *nothing* is worth a nuclear war, attests the extent to which an unashamed acknowledgement of this fear has attained intellectual respectability. (It is not, indeed, a fear of which

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anyone need be ashamed; the prospect of thermonuclear warfare makes analogies with the recent past quite irrelevant, while some recent casuistic exercises on the morality of shooting one's neighbor if he approaches one's shelter afford an instructive foretaste of the quality of life that will await the survivors.) The fear of a catastrophe has now been joined to the conviction that militant and unremitting anti-Communism must inevitably polarize world politics, encompass every political conflict everywhere in the larger struggle, heighten the internal tensions within the antagonistic societies, and thus ultimately produce thermonuclear war. This conviction has been strengthened by the Kennedy administration's (unintended) demonstration that a flexible anti-Communism is impossible.

The President's advisors took office apparently determined to pursue a policy of flexible anti-Communism. They were soon emphasising their anti-Communism at least as much as their flexibility. Why? Intellectuals notorious for their critical views of American institutions (however inconsequential the criticisms might actually be), firmly convinced of the value of pluralism (if less convinced, some of them, that they lived in a pluralistic society), they had reason to demonstrate, publicly, their unquestioned loyalty to their society. Briefly, they feared the unreasoning political hysteria of their countrymen. They were induced, then, to reinforce the latter's anti-Communism. The "Alliance for Progress" has been accompanied by the crudest sort of pressures for an anti-Castro front; the congressmen who escorted the Secretary of State to Punta del Este were less interested in land reform in Latin America than in sanctions on Cuba. That land reform can hardly be pursued energetically by the administration in these circumstances seems clear. Professor Rostow's recent ignoble journey to Paris to ask NATO help against Cuba constitutes a sufficient commentary on the futility of attempting to develop a new politics on old ideological assumptions.

Systematic anti-Communism seems peculiarly incapable of fusion with a radically innovating social policy. The melancholy post-war history of Western European Social Democracy is instructive: democratic socialism, as practised by it, is difficult to distinguish from welfare capitalism (and has little persuasive power beyond the borders of particular countries). European Social Democracy has done rather little to give a positive political content to anti-Communism, even if it has succeeded in keeping Spain as an informal rather than a formal NATO ally. More than the suspicion that systematic anti-Communism is difficult to join with a new democratic politics underlies its recent dif-

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ficulties; it is now clear that it may well constitute a hindrance to the development of an effective radicalism in the West. Recent political style in the Western countries has been, at best, hard and technical—as if all ideological questions had been settled. (At worst, it has been brittle and manipulative—as if these had *not* been settled.) The tendency to a defensive affirmation of Western democratic society's theoretical values and to a diminution (Communist fashion) of awareness of the discrepancy between these values and the society's institutions is especially evident in the rhetorical status of the New Frontier. It is true that in America any hint of a modification in the ideology and practice of a certain type of capitalism evokes a systematic counter-reaction of great ferocity, which can exploit the anxieties of a public ignorant of any possibilities other than those before its nose. Everywhere, however, systematic anti-Communism is accompanied by a fear of change and experimentation half cultivated by those who know how to profit by it, half simply the psychological consequence of the diversion of moral energy into anti-Communism. The recent scepticism about anti-Communism among the intellectuals is also due to a renewed radicalism, or rather their search for a new radical politics.

The demand for a new radical politics in the West has been encouraged by the crisis in Communism itself. Those who thought minimal the capacity of the human spirit to resist continuing indoctrination, intimidation and terror were astonished by the events of 1956—and encouraged to reconsider their pessimism about the possibility of change within Western societies. The political apathy and materialism of Western populations now appeared less immutable than they had thought. (That apathy and materialism, incidentally, also immunized western European populations to some extent against anti-Communism—if only by heightening their sense that they had a great deal to lose in a war, the reasons for which seemed increasingly gratuitous.) Questions about the quality of life in Western societies were not new; they have been taken up, however, by those whose experiences did not predispose them to the standardized sorts of Western ideological defense. The role of the new generation, whose members were themselves never deceived by Stalinism, is clear; the contribution to the new political temper made by Christian political thinkers has been overlooked. Precisely the Christians, however, were attracted by the spiritual elements in a Communist ideology undergoing internal revision by Communist dissenters—and were, therefore, reluctant to endorse a spiritualized anti-Communism.

A new social criticism in the West has led, almost inevitably, to a

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break with the ideology of anti-Communism. The peculiar obscurantism entailed in endorsing specific social changes in the West in order to prove "our" superiority to the Communists has proved to be a totally insufficient, and indeed self-negating, basis for that criticism. The moral energies necessary for an attack on the discrepancy between Western theory and Western practice have been released by a direct examination of the discrepancy, in its own terms and in its own setting. Paradoxically but effectively, the interdependence of modern politics has endowed Western politics with a certain autonomy again; the tumult in Communism has allowed Western disturbances to rise to the surface. Further, that interdependence has put anti-Communism in a new perspective. Communism *is* a relevant issue in Africa, Asia and Latin America; it is not, however, relevant in the ways insisted upon by a crude anti-Communism (as the recent conflicts within the Cuban Revolution show).

Anti-Communism, as an intellectually respectable position, is ending; it is difficult to say precisely what will fill the ensuing ideological vacuum. What can be said is that the coming end of anti-Communism will place grievous burdens upon the American intellectuals. The new political criticism in America, followed by the intellectuals' disappointment in the Kennedy Administration, has destroyed that quasi-euphoric reconciliation with their country which so many were experiencing only a few years ago. The American intellectuals know this of their countrymen (what they don't know of any other population): their illusions of omnipotence, their ignorance, their anxiety and their despair may end mankind's existence. The growing conviction amongst American social critics that acceptance of the prospect of thermonuclear warfare is an expression of disdain for life itself is an insight of considerable profundity. It is not, however, one with which it is easy to live—and the labor of developing a politics which would cure this pathology seems Sysiphean. In their struggle with these problems, however, those who think in America can rely on the support and cooperation of their fellow intellectuals elsewhere. In a period of disorientation, that may not be much—but it is something.

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Leslie Fiedler

AN ALMOST IMAGINARY INTERVIEW: HEMINGWAY IN KETCHUM

> But what a book they both agreed, would be
> the real story of Hemingway, not those he
> writes but the confessions of the real
> Ernest Hemingway . . .
>
> *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

I am writing now the article which I have known for months I must someday write, not merely because he is dead but because there sits on the desk before me a telegram from a disturbed lady whom I can not quite remember or despise. "Your confiding reminiscences of Papa Hemingway," it reads, "reminiscent of Louella (Hearst)." The clichés of "Papa" and "Hearst" date but do not identify the sender; and the fact that she has wired her malice from Seattle only confuses me. Why Seattle? Surely the few cagey remarks I have made to a reporter about my experiences in Ketchum, Idaho do not constitute "confiding reminiscences"—dictated as they were as much by a desire to conceal as to reveal, and concerned as they as with my own dismay rather than the details of Hemingway's life. How did they get to Seattle? And in what form?

I am aware, of course, of having told over the past six months in at least as many states the story of my inconclusive encounter with Hemingway last November. I have never been able to tell it until after the third drink or the fourth, and then always to those who, I was convinced, would understand that I was talking about a kind of terror which rather joined me to than separated me from a stranger whose voice I have known all my adult life—a stranger obviously flirting with despair, a stranger whose destruction I could not help feeling my own calamity, too. After all, I was only talking the way everyone talks all the time about American letters, the plight of the American writer. What could be more banal or harmless?

But I can tell from the poor conventional ironies of the telegram before me what I have come to suspect already from my need to say

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over and over precisely how it was in Ketchum: that what is at stake is an image by which we have all lived—surviving haters of Hearst, middlebrow adulators of *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* Jews who have managed somehow to feel closer to Jake Barnes than to Robert Cohn—the lady from Seattle and I. That image I must do my best to shatter, though on one level I cannot help wishing that it will survive my onslaught.

I do not want ever to see the newspaper article that cued the wire. I am willing to accept responsibility for whatever the press in its inaccuracy and confusion made of my own inaccuracy and confusion; but I want to accept it without having read it. If amends are to be made for pieties offended, they must be made by setting down the best version of what I am able to remember, by my writing this piece which perhaps already is being misunderstood by those who have managed to get so far.

I went to see Hemingway just after Hallowe'en last year along with Seymour Betsky, a colleague from Montana State University, the university attended briefly by one of Hemingway's sons; and, much more importantly, the one from which Robert Jordan took off for the War in Spain in *For Whom the Bell Tolls.* From a place as much myth as fact, from Hemingway's mythical home (I am told that during his last trip to Spain he signed tourist autographs, "E. Hemingway, Red Lodge, Montana"), I set out across the three hundred miles to his last actual home near Sun Valley, a winter resort out of season. We were charged with persuading Hemingway to give a public lecture at our school, to make the kind of appearance he has resolutely refused to make, to permit—like a good American—a larger audience to look at him than would ever read him, even in *Life.* Actually, we felt ourselves, though we did not confess it aloud, neither professors nor promoters, but pilgrims —seeking the shrine of a God in whom we were not quite sure be believed.

I had long since put on record my only slightly begrudged acknowledgment of Hemingway's achievement: his invention of a major prose style viable in the whole western world, his contrivance of the kind of short story young writers are not yet done imitating, his evocation in *The Sun Also Rises* of a peculiar terror and a special way of coming to terms with it that must seem to the future the very hallmark of our age. But I had also registered my sense of his mindlessness, his sentimentality, his failure to develop or grow. And I could not help recalling as I hurtled half-asleep beside the driver through the lucid air of not-yet winter, up and down the slopes of such mountains as haunted Hemingway, a symposium in Naples just ten years before. I had been

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arguing in a tongue not my own against what I took to be the uncritical Italian veneration of Hemingway; and I was shouting my protest to one of those young writers from Rome or Palermo or Milan who write in translated Hemingwayese about hunting and *grappa* and getting laid—but who have no sense of the night-time religious anguish which makes Hemingway a more Catholic writer than most modern Italians. "Yes," I remembered saying, "yes—sometimes he puts down the closest thing to silence attainable in words, but often what he considers reticence is only the garrulousness of the inarticulate." This I hoped at least I was managing to say.

What really stirred in me on that long blue ride into dusk and the snowless valley (there was near dismay in the shops and cafés since the season was at hand and no snow had fallen) was an old resentment at those, chiefly but not exclusively Europeans, unable to understand that Hemingway was to be hated and loved not merely as a special American case, but more particularly as a Western writer, even as an imaginary Montanan. It seemed only fair that revolutions and illness and time bring him to Sun Valley to die, to the western slopes of America, rather than to Spain or Africa or Cuba; and it was scarcely ironical that his funeral be held in a tourists' haven, a place where the West sells itself to all comers.

Hemingway never wrote a book set in the mountain West, but he wrote none in which innocence and nobility, heroism and cowardice, devotion and passion (not love but *aficion*) are not defined as they are in the T.V. Westerns which beguile a nation. The West he exploited is the West not of geography but of our dearest and most vulnerable dreams, not a locale but a fantasy, whose meanings do not change when it is called Spain or Africa or Cuba. As long as the hunting and fishing is good. And the women can be left behind. In Gary Cooper, all at which Hemingway merely hinted was made explicit; for Cooper was what Hemingway only longed to be, the West made flesh—his face, in its inarticulate blankness, a living equivalent of Hemingway's prose style.

It is not at all odd to find a dramatist and a favorite actor collaborating in the creation of character and image; what Tennessee Williams imagines, for instance, Marlon Brando is—or has obligingly become. But a similar collaboration between novelist and actor seems to me unparallelled in literary history—a little strange, though in this case inevitable. How aptly the paired deaths of Cooper and Hemingway, each greeted as a national calamity, climaxed and illuminated their relationship, their joint role in sustaining on upper cultural levels an image of our character and fate common enough in pulps, comic

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books and T.V. That they did not manage to see each other before Cooper died seemed to the press (and to me) a more than minor disaster, mitigated perhaps by the fact that the one did not long survive the other. And like everyone else, I was moved by Hemingway's telegram offering Cooper odds of two to one that he would "beat him to the barn."

Death had presided over their association from the start, since their strongest link was Robert Jordan, invented by one, played by the other: the Westerner as fighter for Loyalist Spain, the anti-Fascist cowboy, the Montana innocent in a West turned oddly political and complex, a land ravaged not by the conflict of outlaw and sheriff but by the struggle between Communist and Nazi. In such a West, what can the Western Hero do but—despite the example of his immortal prototypes—die? Unlike the War for the American West, the War in Spain was lost by Our Side; and finally only its dead seemed true heroes. Hemingway's vision in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is something less than tragic; but his self-pity is perhaps more adequate than tragedy itself to an age unsure of who its heroes are or what it would like to do with them.

Only a comic view could have been truer to our times, and this Hemingway notoriously lacks. He never knew how funny the Westerner had come to seem in our world, whether played by Roy Rogers or Cooper or Hemingway himself—only how sad. Of all his male leads, Jake Barnes comes closest to being redeemed from self-pity by humor—the humor implicit in his comic wound. And consequently Jake could no more have been played by Cooper than could the Nick Adams of the earliest stories, or the old men of the last books. Never quite young, Cooper was not permitted to grow really old—only to betray his age and suffering through the non-commital Montana mask. He represents ideally the protagonists of Hemingway's middle novels, Lieutenant Henry and, of course, Jordan; but he will not do for anything in *To Have and To Have Not,* a depression book and, therefore, an ill-conceived sport sufficient unto Humphrey Bogart. The roles on either side of middle age, Hemingway was able to play himself, off the screen yet in the public eye: the beautiful young man of up to twenty-three with his two hundred and thirty-seven wounds, the old stud with his splendid beard and his guns chased in silver. We cannot even remember the face of his middle years (except as represented by Cooper), only the old-fashioned photographs of the youth who became the "Papa" of cover-stories in *Look* and *Life*: his own doomed father, his own remotest ancestor as well as ours.

At any rate, it was a pilgrimage we contemplated, my colleague and I, leaving Missoula some twenty-five years after the fictional departure

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of Robert Jordan. But it was also—hopefully—a raid: an expedition intended to bring Hemingway home to Montana, where he might perhaps succeed in saying what he had never been able to say to outlanders, speak the meanings of the place in which we had been born or had improbably chosen to live. It was, I suppose, *my* Western I hoped Hemingway would play out (becoming for me what Cooper had been for him); and there would have been something appropriately comic, after all, in casting the boy from Oak Park, Illinois in a script composed by the boy from Newark, New Jersey, both of them on location in the Great West. But, of course, the first words we exchanged with Hemingway made it clear that if he had ever been able to speak in public, he was unable to do so now; that if he did, indeed, possess a secret, he was not about to reveal it from the platform. And how insolent, how absurd the quest seems in retrospect—excused only by a retrospective sense that what impelled us was a need to identify with an image we thought we despised. If it was not an act of love we intended, it was a more typical American effort magically to establish something worthy of love. *Here or Nowhere is America.* Surely the phrase rang someplace in the back of my head as we approached Ketchum; but Here turned out to be Nowhere and Hemingway in the middle of it.

At first, however, we were elated, for we were able to reach quickly the young doctor we had been told was Hemingway's friend and hunting companion; and we were as much delighted as embarrassed (everything seemed to be composing itself more like a poem than a mere event) by the fact that he was called, symbolically, Dr. Saviers. They hunted together during the afternoons, Dr. Saviers told us, though Hemingway could no longer crouch in a blind, only walk in search of birds, his last game. Hemingway worked mornings, but perhaps he would adjust his routine, find some time for us the next day before noon . . . after all, we had driven three hundred miles . . . and even though he never made public appearances, still . . .

We sat that night in a half-deserted bar, where the tourists had not yet come and the help waited on each other, making little ingroup jokes. No one noticed us nursing over our drinks the elation about which we scarcely dared speak. God knows what unworthy elements fed our joy: a desire for scraps of gossip or occasions for articles, a secret yearning to be disappointed, to find the world figure fatuous or comic or—No, surely there were motives less ignoble at its root: a genuine hope that emanating from greatness (the word came unbidden to our minds) there would be a *mana* we could share, a need somehow to verify the myth. We entered Hemingway's house through a back porch

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in character with the legend—limp ducks hanging from the rafters, a gun against the wall—the home of the hunter; but to step into the kitchen was to step out of the mythic world. There were the neatly wrapped trick-or-treat packages left over from the week before, loot unclaimed by kids; *The Readers Digest, The T.V. Guide* open on tables; and beyond, the nondescript furniture of a furnished house, a random selection of meaningless books on the half-empty shelves.

And the Hemingway who greeted us, framed by the huge blank television screen that dominated the living room, was an old man with spectacles slipping down his nose. An old man at sixty-one. For an instant, I found myself thinking absurdly that this must be not the Hemingway we sought but his father, the ghost of that long-dead father —materialized at the age he would have been had he survived. Hemingway's handclasp I could scarcely feel; and I stood there baffled, a little ashamed of how I had braced myself involuntarily for a bone-crushing grip, how I must have yearned for some wordless preliminary test of strength. I had not known, I realized standing dumb before one even dumber, how completely I had been victimized by the legend Hemingway had worn himself out imagining, writing, living.

Why should he not, after all, inhabit a bourgeois house, sit before T.V. with a drink in his hand, while his wife passed out Hallowe'en packages to children? Why the hell not? But he dwindled so abruptly, so touchingly from the great red and white head to his spindly legs, accentuated by tapered pants, legs that seemed scarcely able to hold him up. Fragile, I found myself thinking, breakable and broken—one time too often broken, broken beyond repair. And I remembered the wicked sentence reported by Gertrude Stein, "Ernest is very fragile, whenever he does anything sporting something breaks, his arm, his leg, or his head." The scar of one more recent break was particularly evident on his forehead as he stood before us, inarticulately courteous: a scar just above the eyes that were the wrong color—not blue or grey as they should have been, not a hunter's eyes at all, but the eyes of a poet who dreamed of hunters, brown, soft, scared . . .

These, at least, I knew could not have changed. Whatever had recently travestied him, whatever illness had ravaged his flesh, relaxed his handclasp, could not have changed his eyes. These must have been the same always, must always have tried to confess the secret he had perhaps more hoped than feared would be guessed. "But Jake Barnes is in some sense then a self-portrait," I almost said aloud. "And that's why *The Sun Also Rises* seems your truest book, the book of fear and fact, not bravado and bullshit." I did not speak the words, of course,

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and anyhow he was saying in a hesitant voice, after having listened politely to our names, "Fiedler? Leslie Fiedler. Do you still believe that st— st— stuff about Huck Finn?"

He did not stammer precisely but hesitated over the first sounds of certain words as if unsure he could handle them, or perhaps only a little doubtful that they were the ones he really wanted. And when I had confessed that yes, I did, did still think that most American writers, not only Twain but Hemingway, too (naturally, we did not either of us mention his name in this context), could imagine an ennobling or redemptive love only between males in flight from women and civilization, Hemingway tried to respond with an appropriate quotation. "I don't believe what you say," he tried to repeat, "but I will defend to the death your right to say it." He could not quite negotiate this platitude, however, breaking down somewhere in the neighborhood of "defend." Then—silence.

I knew the motives of my own silence though I could only speculate about his. I had been cast, I could see, in the role of The Critic, hopelessly typed; and I would be obliged to play out for the rest of our conversation not the Western I had imagined, but quite another fantasy: the tragi-comic encounter of the writer and the mistrusted professional reader upon whom his reputation and his survival depend. That Hemingway was aware at all of what I had written about him somehow disconcerted me. He was, I wanted to protest, a character in my *Love and Death in the American Novel;* and how could a character have read the book in which he lived? One does not imagine Hamlet reading the play that bears his name. But I was also, I soon gathered, a semi-fictional character—generically, to be sure, rather than particularly—a Hemingway character, an actor in his imaginary world. So that finding me before him made flesh, he felt obliged to play out with me a private drama, for which he would, alas, never be able to frame quite appropriate sentences, an allegorical quarrel with posterity. At least, for an hour he could get the dialogue out of his haunted head.

He had read or glanced at, I could soon see, not only my essays but practically everything anyone had written on the modern novel in the United States. I fancied him flipping the pages, checking the indexes (or maybe he got it all out of book reviews in *Time*), searching out the most obscure references to himself, trying to find the final word that would allay his fears about how he stood; and discovering instead, imbedded in the praise that could never quite appease his anguish, qualifications, slights, downright condemnations. "T-tell Norman Mailer," he said at one point, "I never got his book. The mails in

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Cuba are— are— terrible." But who would have guessed that Hemingway had noticed the complaint in *Advertisements for Myself* about his never having acknowledged a presentation copy of *The Naked and the Dead.* And yet the comment was not out of character; for at another point he had said, really troubled, "These d-damn students. Call me up in the middle of the night to get something they can h-hang me with. So they can get a Ph.D." And most plaintively of all, "Sometimes when a man's in—when he can stand it least, they write just the things that—"

Between such observations, we would regard each other in the silence which seemed less painful than talk until Seymour Betsky would rescue us. I did not really want to be rescued, it seems to me now, finding silence the best, the only way of indicating that I knew what was racking the man I faced, knew his doubt and torment, his fear that he had done nothing of lasting worth, his conviction that he must die without adequate reassurance. It was not for Hemingway that I felt pity; I was not capable of such condescension. It was for myself, for all American writers. Who, *who,* I kept thinking, would ever know in these poor United States whether or not he had made it, if Hemingway did not. I may even have grown a little angry at his obtuseness and uncertainty.

"A whole life-time of achievement," I wanted to shout at him, "a whole life-time of praise, a whole life-time of revelling in both. What do you want?" But I said nothing aloud, of course, only went on to myself. "Okay, so you've written those absurd and trivial pieces on Spain and published them in *Life.* Okay, you've turned into the original old dog returning to his vomit. But your weaknesses have never been a secret either from us, or, we've hoped at least, from you. We've had to come to terms with those weaknesses as well as with your even more disconcerting strengths—to know where we are and who, where we go from here and who we'll be when we get there. Don't we have the right to expect the same from you? Don't we have the right to—" But all the while he kept watching me warily, a little accusingly, like some youngster waiting for the reviews of his first book and trying desperately not to talk about it to one he suspects may be a reviewer.

And what could I have told him, I ask myself now, that might have helped, and what right did I really have anyhow, brought there by whim and chance? What could anyone have said to him that had not already been repeated endlessly and without avail by other critics or by sodden adulators at bars. The uncertainty that Hemingway betrayed was a function surely of the depression that was about to destroy him; but, in a deeper sense, that depression must have been the product of the uncertainty—of a life-time of uncertainty behind the bluster and the

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posturing, a life-time of terror indissoluble in alcohol and action, a life-time of fearing the leap out of the dark, never allayed no matter how many beasts he brought down in bush or boondocks.

It was only 9:30 A.M. but, after a longer than customary lapse in our talk, Hemingway broke out a bottle of wine to help ease us all. "Tavel—a fine little wine from the Pyrenees," he said, without, apparently, any defensive irony or even any sense of the comic overtones of the cliché. Silence and platitude. Platitude and silence. This was the pattern of what never became a conversation. And I felt, not for the first time, how close Hemingway's prose style at its best was to both; how it lived in the meagre area of speech between inarticulateness and banality: a triumph wrung from the slenderest literary means ever employed to contrive a great style—that great decadent style in which a debased American speech somehow survives itself.

"It's hard enough for me to wr-write much less—talk," he said twice I think, obviously quoting a favorite platitude of his own invention; and, only once, but with equal satisfaction, "I don't want to talk about literature or politics. Once I talked about literature and I got—sick." One could hear in his tone how often he must, in similar circumstances, have used both; but he meant the first of them at least. The word "articulate" became in his mouth an insult, an epithet. Of Norman Mailer, for instance, he said between pauses, quietly, "He's s-so— articu— late—" and there was only a little envy to mitigate the contempt. But he wanted to talk about literature really, or, more precisely, wanted to talk about authors, his colleagues and rivals. Yet his comments on them boiled down to two only: the first for writers over fifty, "Great guy, you should've known him!"; the second for those under that critical age, "That boy has talent!" Vance Bourjaily, I recall, seemed to him the "boy" with the most "talent." The one author he did not mention ever was himself, and I abided by the taboo he tacitly imposed, though, like him I fear, more out of cowardice than delicacy.

When I noticed in a particularly hard moment the *T.V. Guide* beside me open to the Saturday Night Fights, I welcomed the cue, tried to abandon Bourjaily in favor of Tiger Jones, though I really admire the style of the one not much more than that of the other. "Terrible what they make those boys do on television," Hemingway responded, like the joker next to you at the bar who baffles your last attempt at communication. And it didn't help a bit when Mrs. Hemingway entered to apologize in an attractive cracked voice for the state of the house. "If I had only known that someone was coming . . ." But why was everyone apologizing and to whom?

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It was the *politeness* of the whole affair which seemed somehow the final affront to the legend. Hemingway was like a well-behaved small boy, a little unsure about the rules, but resolved to be courteous all the same. His very act of asking us to come and talk during his usual working hours and at a moment of evident distress was a gesture of genuine courtesy. And he fussed over the wine as if set on redeeming our difficult encounter with a show of formality. At one point, he started to pour some Tavel into my glass before his own, then stopped himself, put a little into his glass, apologized for having troubled to remember protocol, apologized for apologizing—finally insisted on drinking to my next book, when I lifted my glass to his.

But what were we doing talking of next books when I could not stop the screaming inside of my head, "How will anyone ever know? How will I ever know unless the critics, foolish, biased, bored, tell me, tell us?" I could foresee the pain of reading the reviews of my first novel, just as I could feel Hemingway's pain reading the reviews of his later work. And I wanted to protest in the name of the pain itself that not separated but joined us: The critic is obliged only to the truth though he knows that truth is never completely in his grasp. Certainly he cannot afford to reckon with private anguish and despair in which he is forbidden to believe, like the novelist, inventing out of his friends and his own shame Lady Brett or Robert Cohn.

And I looked up into Hemingway's smile—the teeth yellowish and widely spaced, but bared in all the ceremonious innocence of a boy's grin. He was suddenly, beautifully, twelve years old. A tough, cocky, gentle boy still, but also a fragile, too-often-repaired old man, about (how could I help knowing it?) to die. It puzzled me a little to discover him, who had never been able to invent a tragic protagonist, so much a tragic figure himself—with meanings for all of us, meanings utterly different from those of his myth, meanings I would have to figure out later . . . Yet he seemed, too, as we had always suspected, one who had been *only* a boy and an old man, never what the rest of us for too wearily long must endure being—all that lies between. I could not help recalling the passage where Gertrude Stein tells of Hemingway at twenty-three crying out that he was too young to be a father. And I could hear him now in my inner ear crying out that he was too young to be an old man. Too young to be an ancestor.

But he was not too young to be my ancestor, not too young for me to resent as one resents what is terribly there when he is born. I would not be able to say the expected kind things about him ever, I knew, not even after he was dead. And who would understand or

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believe me when I was ready to say what I could: that I loved him for his weakness without ceasing to despise him for his strength.

We had left Seymour Betsky's car in town, and as the four of us looked at each other now, more than ready to be done with our meeting, Hemingway and his wife offered to drive us back in to pick it up. He had to do some small chores, chiefly go to the bank. But it was a Saturday, as we had all forgotten; and Betsky and I stood for a moment after we had been dropped off watching Hemingway bang at the closed glass doors, rather feebly perhaps but with a rage he was obviously tickled to be able to feel. "Shit," he said finally to the dark interior and the empty street; and we headed for our car fast, fast, hoping to close the scene on the first authentic Hemingway line of the morning. But we did not move quite fast enough, had to hear over the slamming of our car door the voice of Mrs. Hemingway calling to her husband (he had started off in one direction, she in another), "Don't forget your vitamin tablets, daddy."

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Karl Shapiro

THE BOURGEOIS POET

I am an atheist who says his prayers.
I am an anarchist, and a full professor at that. I take the loyalty oath.
I am a deviate. I fondle and contribute, backscuttle and brown, father of three.
I stand high in the community. My name is in *Who's Who*. People argue about my modesty.
I drink my share and yours and never have enough. I freeload officially and unofficially.
A physical coward, I take on all intellectuals, established poets, popes, rabbis, chiefs of staff.
I am a mystic. I will take an oath that I have seen the Virgin. Under the dry pandanus, to the scratching of kangaroo rats, I achieve psychic onanism. My tree of nerves electrocutes itself.
I uphold the image of America and force my luck. I write my own ticket to oblivion.
I am of the race wrecked by success. The audience brings me news of my death. I write out of boredom, despise solemnity. The wrong reason is good enough for me.
I am of the race of the prematurely desperate. In poverty of comfort I lay gunpowder plots. I lapse my insurance.
I am the babbitt metal of the future. I never read more than half of a book. But that half I read forever.
I love the palimpsest, statues without heads, fertility dolls of the continent of Mu. I dream pre-history, the invention of dye. The palms of the dancers' hands are vermilion. Their heads oscillate like the cobra. High caste woman smelling of earth and silk, you can dry my feet with your hair.

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I take my place beside the philistine and unfold my napkin. This afternoon I defend the Marines. I goggle at long cars.

Without compassion I attack the insane. Give them the horsewhip!

The homosexual lectures me brilliantly in the beer booth. I can feel my muscles soften. He smiles at my terror.

Pitchpots flicker in the lemon groves. I gaze down on the plains of Hollywood. My fine tan and my arrogance, my gray hair and my sneakers, O Israel!

Wherever I am I become. The power of entry is with me. In the doctor's office a patient, calm and humiliated. In the foreign movies a native, shabby enough. In the art gallery a person of authority (there's a secret way of approaching a picture. Others move off). The high official insults me to my face. I say nothing and accept the job. He offers me whiskey.

How beautifully I fake! I convince myself with men's room jokes and epigrams. I paint myself into a corner and escape on pulleys of the unknown. Whatever I think at the moment is true. Turn me around in my tracks; I will take your side.

For the rest, I improvise and am not spiteful and water the plants on the cocktail table.

* * *

When I dismissed you, friend, why did I do that? The Judas in me is strong. With an effort I regain my loyalty, and lose it again. These virtues incapacitate me. The solitude of the masochist is mine.

Albatross of a prize, you who married me to a newspaper, you who made me a government, why can't I thank you?

Kindness of deep hostility, my patience of a saint, endless capacity for love—mother, did I have the breast really? (But you gave me girls in your own likeness.)

This laissez-aller, this Traumdeutung—am I really a poet? Do I give a damn? That too I betray. I cross my fingers and exclude bedfellow death. I rub the icebox with my swimming thighs. I embrace the white rhinoceros; I propose to toilets.

What right have I to be healthy? What right have I to escape? And what is it I have escaped? I explore opportunities. The rising sun sits on my other head. My cancer is blooming.

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I insist on the middleaged poet. Brats of the drunken boat, centurions in the pay of Congress, gray and forgetful, purposefully stupid —God bless you, and Congress.

Marvelously recapitulating man, the child, reviving literature, invents religion. The dog flops on the floor with graceful disgust.

Goldfish, I loved you. When you died I cried. I'm no biologist. I did my best. I know. I overfed you. I was warned on the box. (The air-force officer has a tropical tank. His fishes glitter like a jewelry store.)

* * *

New York, my love, we never went to bed. (You never asked me.) New York, my Jewess, you read me Kierkegaard on the subway, standing up. I didn't give you a chance to kill me, N.Y.

Chicago, what did I do to you? What's another stab in the back, Chicago?

New York, killer of poets, do you remember the day you passed me through your lower intestine? The troop train paused under Grand Central. That line of women in mink coats handed us doughnuts through the smutty windows. They were all crying. For that I forgive New York. (We smuggled a postcard off at New Haven.)

Chicago, smothered in boredom and pigs: your gothic universities, your Portuguese wines, your bad baseball.

New York, island of prisons. New York of a billion black Rimbauds. Chicago of dreamy cardinals.

What was it like, New York, when the skyscrapers were white? New York of Hart Crane. Harlem of Lorca.

Chicago of T. S. Eliot (his city). Chicago of bad impulses.

* * *

All things remain to be simplified. I find I must break free of the poetry trap.

The books I hunger for are always out, never to be returned: illuminations, personal bibles, diatribes, chapters denied acceptance in scripture, Tobit blinded by sparrows muting warm dung in his eyes, immense declarations of revolt, manuals of the practice of love.

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I seek the entrance of the rabbit hole. Maybe it's the door that has no name.

My century, take savagery to your heart. Take wooden idols, walk them through the streets. Bow down to Science.

My century that boils history to a pulp for newspaper, my century of the million dollar portrait, century of the decipherment of Linear B and the old scrolls, century of the dream of penultimate man (he wanders among the abandoned skyscrapers of Kansas; he has already forgotten language), century of the turning-point of time, the human wolf-pack and the killing light.

* * *

Crazy-clean, our armies and bodies. Crazy-clean the institutions of the mind. Crazy-clean Washington, D.C.

The generals say: mop up, no sweat, cordon sanitaire, liquidate, flush, wipe out.

How many have escaped the prison of Art? Who has not been extradited? Through the blue grid of technique we read the wild faces.

Stanza means room, with bars on it. Form means shape, beaten and maimed. It is done, ingeniously done, immortally done. For a century or two it pleases and instructs.

Now and again, one of the slaves escapes. His eyes are put out with platinum hat-pins.

To escape to America. How is it there? Do the blue-coats smile?

The little ones file into the classroom. The giggling dies down. They salute the flag. They bow their heads. Childhood is over. When the air-raid sounds they crouch on the floor like Moslems. It's only for practice of course.

I tell the secret of the starving artist. A day after he died the chauffeurs knocked at the door.

Poets of early death, who overturned the boat? Physician John Keats, cure thyself!

Lists of the mad and bibles of the damned. Dictionaries of suicide, card indexes of the compulsive revolutionaries, Protestant cemeteries of sacred remains. Beatification of the Dutchman's ear. Under the dome of poetry an array of saints as broken as christological glass. Martyrology of prosodists. Mariolatry of Hebrews. Every twilight of the mind for sale.

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Counterfeiters, defenders of hell-gate. The intentionally mad, aristocrats of the verb, apologists of exile, culture nationalists, founders of the Next Phase.

Studies of the decrease of light. Paintings of right angles. Poems with square edges. Literary quarterlies refined from steel.

* * *

The teacher recites her lesson: the poem lifts me; it tips my arrows. No matter the horror; it washes us, the blood-washed poem.

The teacher recites her lesson: this is reality; this is the ideal. This is the touch of God. My Muse, my mother, my fertile one. (A slow leak in the footnotes: the goddess bleeds apace.)

Why do you paint your lips? Is it time to eat?

The tigress rolls its cubs. The dainty sparrow, proletarian bird, lights on the horse turd, a golden bun. The mouse in the trap has exquisite fur. I touch it with my fingers before I lift it from the drawer on its well-made mouse trap. The vertebra of the rattlesnake lies in the palm of my hand, a masterpiece of subtle bone. Where did you get it? The doll pouts: the child is learning a picture. You have to be taught to *read* a picture. The savage looks at the photograph of himself; he turns it sideways and upside-down. Why doesn't it register?

The class convenes in the library attic. I introduce myself and throw their books out of the window. We will write a poem together, I say. (I see the gothic in their eyes.) It turns out nicely.

My Utamaro is pea-green. I see what Vincent saw.

Sunday cut into colored squares, *Chicago Tribune,* Japanese print of future generations, I collect your yellows and washy blues. Bold line of Dick Tracy, Lautrec of murder, sexless, decisive, one riddle solved, a fresh body produced. Your palindromes, a villain named Etah. Evil, said Carroll, is live spelled backwards.

Permanent orphan of generations, has Daddy gone to fight the Communists with his private army and his diamond stickpin? Carrot-top orphan who still says *Hark!*

Cornbeef and cabbage man, pining for the brownstone days. Matronly Maggie with a rolling pin. (Pogo and Peanuts leave me cold.)

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Sirens with black lips and identical faces. Fly-boys in the orient; regulation uniforms.

Tillie and Mack in the Kinsey Collection. In New Guinea the Japanese propaganda drawings dropped from a Zero: Yank, this is what civilian is doing to your wife back home. (Showing what.) Colors of Utamaro.

Frank Merriwell at Yale. Tom the fun-loving Rover. Tom Swift and his electric grandmother (joke). Alger, Henty, S. S. Van Dine.

"Patterns" by Amy Lowell. And in Virginia, *Southern Prose and Poetry.*

Books for the sake of shelves. Encyclopedia of railroad engineering, sixty-seven volumes, fold-out plates of boilers, piston assembly. The Waverley novels, dark tomes maroon and brown to handle on a rainy day. Balzac complete, unread. The Harvard Classics, mean, unprovocative, *Veritas* stamped on the backbone.

* * *

Poem, is it de rigueur to descend to hell? Will you lose your pedigree?

How business-like is convention. What slag the prodigies of the epic mind. How little human the heroes and angels.

Tell me again what tragedy is. I can never remember.

Because the king is a fool and the lady a bitch; because a woman butchers her children to spite her husband; or a man makes love to his mother by mistake—shall I descend to hell?

Because the dollar tips the scales; or certain languages are dead; the nobility bankrupt; because the government has awarded you teeth—shall I descend to hell?

I descend and find the usual evidence. And Paul made love to Frances and they burn forever.

Where are you taking me, Alighieri? I have a different religion. I go with Geoffrey to the house of April. Gottfried of Strassburg, give us the gutsy Tristan.

Children play on the gorgeous baldaquin, climbing the marble vines while the mothers kneel, eating the Body. The priest moves rapidly from mouth to mouth. Black and white, the barbaric tower rears over history. It's no playground.

The bloodshot Germans enter the Forum in shorts. Proudly they gaze on the fine destruction.

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In Bombay the vegetarians storm the hotel: "You are eating the flesh of the god!" A dirty cow stands in the doorway of the office building. A Hindu gives it a kick in the rump and sends it off in the rain.

I teach the emotions: I. The head is a hugeness already. Sin is ruled out. A tropic laugh splits heaven up the middle.

The disciplinarians stalk between the flowers. The whips crash on the bitten fingernails. It's war from the start. The books are weighted with lead. The catechism demands more algebra. Down on your knees.

Who teaches manners of fear? Who teaches reverence of wealth? Why so many books? What fabulous detail, what attractive bindings! Did you take the Intelligence Test this morning? Would you like to learn Russian?

The mind, the mind, cleaned like a car, purring like a fan. And the feelings matted and stuck, scratching the lice of love.

Do you hate your face? It is your sex you hate. Worship has pigged your eyes.

* * *

O love, phenomenon of attention, hear me out! I hold the shaving mirror to all:

To you at breakfast with folded newspaper,

You with the telephone in your hand and the glass name on the door,

You the alumnus, recipient of telegraphed congratulations,

You on election night, you in the driver's seat,

You in dutiful coitus, you in social drunkenness, you in parental storm;

At the cornerstone, near the triumphal arch, on the cruise deck, in the ad for bitters,

In the photograph of the first lieutenant, signed "Ages ago,"

In the vestry room with the males and the white flower,

In the waiting room of the daffodil maternity ward,

At the elegant tent beside the open grave (the coffin glows like a fine piano);

To you saluting, you baring your head, you holding the scissor to the early rose—

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Did you know the damasked walls gave way so rottenly, the gilted wood so mealy with fatigue?
Did you see the estates divided and plowed and the monstrous houses opened to view for your sad Sundays?
Aren't you the popular song of God in the formstone churches, you of ideals and virtues, responsible, lovable, disciplined, free?
Isn't it you you mutter against, with your fuzzed haircut in your wife's bosom?
Citizen, is your glorious revolution over and done with?
And you, my country, how does it feel to be They?

What are those objects on which our eyes are frozen?
Flag on the candy-factory grammar school;
Eternal light hung from a silver chain above the Ark in the synagogue;
Samurai sword in the French admiral's possession (to be given to a poet on a state occasion);
Rectilinear facade of Greek; font of the Hebrew; spittle of the christer contorting on the bare ground;
Finder of inscapes; critique of frameless abstractions; voyeurs of myth;
Hypnotised lovers; napoleonic captains of copper mines; editors of quack compendia of knowledge;
All worshipers, all fanatics, all absorbed in the object which is really you,
You who descry the streamings of life as other and beyond;
You strapped to your muscles (is the culture-gag in your teeth?);
Altars, uniforms of every description, detritus of battles, delirium of ethics, codes of the good, new wars, new medals, new masterpieces forged for the market;
Heavy stone of your overturned lives, what crawling dreams!
What is it you are trying to become, men of my species?
Homo normalis, blind as a bat, that music you hear is coming from you.
Where did you study the physics of the epic? What is this eternal conspiracy of distraction? Why are the sick the most articulate? Poetry weaving at the bar, go home. Somebody call a cab.
Who are these that compound the mystery? Tell me about the Dewey Decimal System.

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Do something about the sour smell of schools. Call the Americans!
Herewith I abolish up and down. Future and past for those with radial vision.
Everything everywhere has been decided in everyone's favor.
I end on the dead level and peter out. Is it time for the curtain?
Shall we applaud at the end of the second movement?

* * *

I love Nowhere where the factories die of malnutrition.
I love Nowhere where there are no roads, no rivers, no interesting Indians,
Where history is invented in the History Department and there are no centennials of anything,
Where every tree is planted by hand and has a private tutor,
Where the "parts" have to be ordered and the sky settles all questions,
Where travelers from California bitch at the backwardness and New Yorkers step on the gas in a panic,
Where the grass in winter is gray not brown,
Where the population diminishes.
Here on the boundary of the hired West, equidistant from every tourist office, and the air is washed by distance, here at last there is nothing to recommend.
May no one ever attempt a recommendation; Chicago be as far as Karachi.
Though the warriors come with rockets, may they fall off the trucks.
May the voting be light and the clouds like a cruise and the criminal boredom enter the district of hogs.
I love Nowhere where the human brag is a brag of neither time nor place,
But an elephant house of smithsonian bones and the white cathedrals of grain,
The feeding-lots in the snow with the steers huddled in symmetrical misery, backs to the sleet,
To beef us up in the Beef State plains, something to look at.

* * *

To the poor (aux pauvres) crime alone (le crime seul) opens (ouvre) les portes de la vie (the doors of life). Entire libraries of music

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are hurled in the gutters: the G.I.'s are looking for bottles. The Bavarian Venus is snatched baldheaded.

I have a big sister; she has mighty breasts. She writes poems for the immigration office. Her crotch is on the fourteenth floor. La géante, la géante!

Standing at the pure white rail, stately we pass you, and the classes mingle as if by decree. At the last buoy the discreet signs begin to take effect: First Class, Second Class. My brazen sister swirling her nightgown, green as the spouts of Chartres. Her comb is combing my lice (but I have no lice). Her apron is hitched up in front. She stands on a full-sized bank.

Across the iambic pentameter of the Atlantic (the pilot dropped, the station wagon in the hold) we sail to the kingdom of Small. Is it cheaper there? Can I buy a slave?

This is the camera with the built-in lie. This is the lens that defies the truth. There's nothing for it but to write the large bad poem in middleclass magic. Poem condemned to wear black, be quoted in churches, versatile as Greek. Condemned to remain unsung by criminals.

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ART CHRONICLE

MASTERS OF THE NEW

Robert Goldwater

Reactions to de Kooning's exhibition at Janis were a revealing tribute to his achievement and his symbolic position. In the public prints, at least, (and this was true of most painters in private) no one seemed able to take a moderate view. There were those for whom this was a major show, because they admired it and were committed to him as an artist (and who can blame them?) and would view any gathering of his work with fervor. There were others who, disappointed in their expectations, felt it was unworthy of him, would allow it little merit and, further, looked on the artist's future with great misgivings. Both reactions testified to de Kooning's importance as the continuing embodiment of the New York School, a role denied to others of his generation, who have, of late, been more "productive." It was rumored that de Kooning himself would have preferred to delay the exhibition, which was held only at his dealer's insistence. Certainly there was something arbitrary about it, though this came less from the simultaneous showing of large and small oils in color and black and white drawings-collages, to which some objected (without reason, since each *genre* has an honorable history within de Kooning's *oeuvre*), than from the padding out of the catalogue and the elaborate presentation of a series of fragmented studies uniformly excized.

But if it was not a "major" show, and if it lacked the single direction that would have made it easier to summarize and so be more satisfactory to discuss, it none the less included work of the clarity and energy that have been characteristic of de Kooning. It has indeed been his virtue that he has hung on to the exploratory nature of his art while arriving at structures whose parts are under control and separable in a large and expanding space, while connected by shape and direction and variegated surface into an undeniable and satisfying unity. He thus arrives at his own personal paradox of an energetic (some call it an anguished) classicism.

One can only suppose that this union of opposites has something to do with the different directions of his work. Those torn and jagged edges which are so important to the living quality of his analyzed

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structures, endowing them with their emotional impact, must also be inherent to de Kooning's whole approach to his art. The "decisions" a few critics have called upon him to make, decisions which would presumably lay the ghost of anguish and permit a free flowing "major" production are, therefore, perhaps simply impossible to this art.

This exploratory character, and the tentative, unfinished, probing quality, unhortatory and unclassical, that it lends to the work, has been considered one of the definitive marks of the New York School. The question may be asked (negligible or crucial, depending upon one's concept of what it is the master masters), whether it is a quality imposed by or imposed upon the artist. The answer seems unimportant to any understanding of de Kooning's work, precisely because while the recalcitrant elements remain in being, sufficient control over them has been established and made evident so that both the raw material and its ordering may be grasped and their relation seized. I cannot, on the other hand, make out of this personal, formal struggle any social principle whose content is a critique of our society. (Were things better, would there be no plastic conflict?) This is not the content of this art and what conscience need pretend it is? If, indeed, this is the mirror of anguish, then it is of another, more human sort, and more than sufficient for its validity.

What is certain is that de Kooning is not a voluble, lyrical artist. (I say this in description, not criticism.) He does not paint as the bird sings, whether with conscious or unconscious ease, nor does he pretend to do so. In the seeking, he transmits the search, and the will that channels it, from confusion to clarity. In all this his painting is opposed to that of Pollock, who in his most fully realized art created pictures of free-flowing ease, arabesques of apparent grace, only occasionally marked by breaks, rarely arrested by fractures, rhythms that swing in upon themselves and are placed upon a few planes picked out in front of an unlimited space. (It is one of the remarkable aspects of Pollock's art, that his problems of creation, so amplified in legend, are so rarely apparent in his best work.) Pollock has an energy to match de Kooning's, but it is of a different sort. Within the framework of abstract expressionism, their styles are in fundamental ways opposite, and it is an irony of the school's history that so many members of the second generation, who had learned dedication to "existentialist" truth as a way of creation nevertheless formed themselves upon an impossible eclectic image of the two masters, and strove simultaneously to exteriorize lyricism and anguish, spontaneity and tormented reflection. The effort prompted many of the younger artists to neglect the particular clarity that each of the two

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older painters achieved by his own method. They thus mistook an unselective profusion for the unrehearsed recording of deep emotion. Unfortunately critical polemics reinforced this notion of the mechanics and the psychology of a mythical abstract expressionist and only confused the understanding of two distinct kinds of painting.

It can be said that Franz Kline proceeded with his art in an opposed direction. His sudden death in May of this year brought to a close some fifteen years of work that had a particular unity and singularity. None of the parallels or sources that were adduced for his painting ever were more than distant approximations; they did not help to understand his vision or his method. Contrary to Pollack and de Kooning, Kline arrived at his clarity suddenly, at the beginning. That there may be connections between the gusto and sweep of his earlier, representational work, especially the bar murals, and his later style does not alter this fact, nor does the probability that de Kooning himself was both influence and counsel at the crucial start. By a radical gesture, Kline reduced his art to its essentials—simple, broad impetuous strokes of black, with no tones, no modeling, on a large white field. A direct and powerful execution of the principle that less is more, but in this case the more was literal: an expanse of primed canvas and black oil paint whose area created an impact, the visual impact of the size itself—this much black and this much white, and the impact of the body-sized movement and the human-scaled design made possible by these dimensions. Here was boldness without pretension. Where in Pollock one looks at or through the plane of the design (so that the space is alternatively flat or deep), in Kline's pictures there is simply space, in which is posed a form that has both coherent shape and strong, drawn direction placed at no measurable distance to the eye or to the canvas.

It is the quality of these pictures that, as they are both static and filled with the movement of applied gesture, so they are both wonderfully achieved and imperfect. That is what sets them off from Chinese calligraphy and from such painting as Soulages' (their size is but the confirmation of the distinction), and makes them at once more accessible and more impressive. The others are finished works, in which by a repetition of style in the one, and a brilliant technique in the other, exploration and the risk of failure have been nullified; the freshness of the sketch, with whose preservation in the final result Delacroix was concerned, has gone, and with it the immediacy of the artistic record. Kline always kept it, and however assured his skill, he employed it to convey the excitement of exploration; whatever the generalization of the means he used, whatever the distance of the abstraction he shaped, Kline always remained an expressionist.

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Having thus found the clarity of his style at the beginning, by what seems now almost an act of revelation (though biographers will piece out the steps), the history of Kline's painting is the history of its elaboration and enrichment. In his exhibitions of 1960 and the end of 1961, there were still pictures made up of a minimum of bold strokes, although there was nothing so simplified as, for example, the early *Chief*. But from 1958 on Kline was working with intermediate tones as well as full black and white, and with successive planes measurably related in recessions as well as the sudden apparition upon an unplumbable space. Some of his pictures that were almost closed in depth, square in shape and with directions angled at seventy and eighty degrees, seemed indebted to de Kooning; but by 1961 he was again working out the development of his own entirely personal style. The immense *1960 New Year Wall: Night* showed how he might have developed further, with a magnitude of conception, an energy of execution, an interplay of shapes and distances, an intensity of light: it possesses all Kline's initial clarity and power, a new subtlety, constant daring tempered by self-confidence.

No doubt there is a sculpture revival. When this phrase was first used a few years ago it referred more to quality than to number, to the acceptance and the extension of the painters' horizons in the work of, for instance, Smith, Lippold and Lassaw, to name three very different directions. Today it must indicate quantity above all. The blow-torch, followed by the junk yard, the automobile graveyard, the *terrains vagues* of the demolition site, and the ordinary sidewalk have increased the number of sculptors alarmingly. These tendencies still continue: Stankiewicz had a handsome if somewhat static exhibition, Chamberlain an impressive show of a few large pieces (though the occasional bits of cloth, added, I was told, to vary and soften texture seemed to me an ephemeral mistake); Weinrib and Sugerman exhibited new staccato rhythms, extreme, eccentric, spatial extensions and brilliant colors (though I thought Weinrib's most subdued piece in whites and yellows his most successful); and Smith earlier showed (along with a number of traditional "totems") a group of surprisingly geometric constructions in which he used his massive metal surface as the denied carrier of floating colors whose shapes and poled harmonies nostalgically recalled the purer and seemingly simpler formal problems of the twenties.

There has now come another kind of revival—that of bronze casting. This extends all the way from the, so to say, expected bronzes of Muller, Consagra, and Paolozzi, through the work of Rosati and the more monumental bronzes of Hadzi, to the extremes of Slivka and Agostini. In general there is a new interest in fine casting, in the qualities of the metal as such and what may be done with its special properties, while

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in the work of the last two there is an exploitation of an extreme flexibility inherent in the wax and the plastics from which the bronze is made. Agostini's refined neo-realism, executed in the most delicate of plasters, so breakable they must be cast if they are to last at all, with their sheer polished surfaces and their accurate rendering of the materials of the mold look like nothing so much as the details of a Bernini marble. Hadzi, too, works directly in the wax, and his Roman piece-molds allow him the flexibility of construction made of many parts, each with its modeled, tangible, light-absorbing surface. The artists of assembled sculpture, and in welded metals, while certainly very different in iconographic aim, are determined to outdo a freedom first sought by painters; so now are these renewers of more traditional techniques.

Theodore Roszak, who exhibited at Pierre Matisse, showed an acute awareness of some of the dangers of accepted stylization. In earlier work (whose best known example is *Kitty Hawk*) he had achieved a fusion of elements, so that reference and representation, style and symbol were all one; the mind might analyze, the eye refused to separate. Recently, introducing a more descriptive depiction of the human figure, he has been employing a newer language; because it is recognizable as a common tongue, already stylized, and refers to representation, it somehow remains apart within the work's abstract shape. The effort at integration perhaps explains the elaboration of the larger pieces; in some of the smaller, simpler ones, it was achieved.

Henry Moore's show at Knoedler's was an exhibition of official art. It explained at once what artists reject when they say they wish to work without style. This was style with a vengeance: modern, monumental, and altogether right—or wrong. Even years ago, the sources of Moore's reclining women, so near at hand in Picasso, so far away in Mexico and Greece, were difficult to forget; now the intervening style was Moore's own, a style applied to the work rather than growing from it. One was blinded by instantaneous recognition and had no need to examine further. In the same way the tall uprights, only too clearly monuments first, were meant to be justified by their reference to a style, this time somehow both ancient English and primitive. It is perhaps because Moore's conscious relation to Art is so clear that compatriot commentary bears down so heavily on Nature and Unconscious. (Suddenly one has enormous respect for all those personal and pictorial antics whose performance wittily keeps Picasso from becoming his own monument; it would be so easy for him.)

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MOVIE CHRONICLE

THE DUPES OF THE ART FILM

Penelope Gilliatt

In England before nylon was invented one used to be offered two sorts of silk: there was real silk, and there was "art silk," which meant artificial silk and was much less appealing than it sounded. The movie industry now has the same division. There is cinema, and there is art cinema, which sometimes seems so far removed from it that the word "art" begins to imply the same abbreviation.

The sort of film the art-movie addict admires is always heavily overweighted with "style," which in this context has little to do with real style, meaning the grace and rightness with which something is expressed: what he likes is a heavy-breathing technique. He is a sitting target for a flashy bit of cutting, and the use of actors as though they were statues seems to him a great step forward. He is impressed when the meaning is as misty and cosmic as possible, and a wink at something metaphysical is all to the good, in spite of the fact that he would think of himself as a rationalist. It is usually accepted that cinema is automatically a mass form, which is why it has invited such peculiar respect from Left sociologists who have no feeling for it, but where art cinema is concerned we should give up the pretense: it is obvious nonsense to suppose that *Wild Strawberries* expresses any idea that is either accessible or interesting to a popular public—unlike, say, *Hamlet* to an Elizabethan audience. We are used to hearing the middle-class intellectual vilifying the theatre for being a middle-class pleasure, but he happily admires movies that are designed to titillate a private sect.

It is hard to think of the art movie without first thinking of the art movie-goer, for without him it would hardly exist. The real gone crank, who is more often a man than a woman for some reason and tends to be between twenty and forty, is always someone who would regard himself as belonging to the Left, since no respectable authority has provided the Right with a systematized aesthetic and without a system our friend feels out in the cold. He turns up for art movies in the same uniform that he also wears to join the congregation at seminars about the future of the Left—called, probably, "Whither Socialism?" or "Commitment at the Crossroads"—and he carries on rebuking correspondences

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about dubbing and the states of film prints with the movie critics of Sunday newspapers. Though he laughs exorbitantly at any Mack Sennett silent, he is short on humor: Antonioni speaks to him like a blood-brother. He detests the theatre, because it employs words, and he suspects movies in which the dialogue is too good. The antique past of the drama is a constant reproach to him, and he therefore goes dutifully to silent sessions at the tabernacle in the Museum of Modern Art or the National Film Theatre in London, trying to manufacture an adequate retort to Aeschylus, Shakespeare and Ibsen out of the films made between 1910 and 1929. This depth of feeling for movies without a sound track may account for his indulgence towards sparsely subtitled works in unknown languages: the concentration on the images that incomprehension allows takes him back to the halcyon days before the talkies. His Socialism does not prevent him from making the most rigid distinction between "good" art and "popular" art, for even an observer as purblind as he is cannot help noticing that the films he really admires never get a commercial release. But the fact that the cinema is a mass form weighs heavily on his Left conscience, and he therefore develops a loyal atoning taste for tenth-rate Westerns and mechanical gangster movies, feeling that they are a pipeline to the people. Elvis Presley interests him on ideological grounds, and he may go miles to see *Hercules Unchained*. Thus the real madman can even create art-cinema out of movies that were never meant to be anything but money-spinning celluloid: he is not as dependent as one might think on works made on 16mm. or in Swedish. British comedies, for instance, have lately become a cultists' stamping-ground in the United States, and the in-group has unerringly picked out the worst of this modest breed for its admiration. Hamminess is respected as a pop virtue, and so is any stock character who makes stock jokes in a language that is suspected to be somebody's vernacular: this may induce an earnest reference to the *commedia dell'arte*. An amiable piece of trumpery called *Carry on Nurse,* an unpretentious popular comedy that is stiff with dead gags, played twenty-five weeks to art cinema audiences in Los Angeles. From where a Briton sits, the phoney-intellectual success of potboilers like this is as rich a fact as an outbreak of textual criticism about the literature on the back of cereal packages. So is the assumption that the bland jokes made by the Boulting Brothers have anything to do with satire. True satire hurts, and the satirist has to expose himself; but when a Tory colonel goes to see *Private's Progress,* their lampoon of Army pomp, he merely chuckles appreciatively and says that they must be amusing fellers.

A critic on a popular paper in England told me recently that all great

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art has to be a little boring. This basic tenet of the philistine, spoken in the usual tone of beefy candor, is absolutely central to the instincts of the art-cinema-lover for the real faddist will spring into the arms of the insupportable with a ready embrace. He will sit through comedies that leave him frozen and pretend to himself that he is having a ball; he will go to obscurantist movies like Bergman's and relish the fog in his nostrils, and he will endure the tedium of Antonioni's slow-pulse films because they so perfectly recreate the pinched character of his own life that he takes them to be studies of the contemporary condition. The robustness of a movie like *Rocco and his Brothers* or *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is something that he cannot quite face, and he is likely to hack at it with some such cut as "theatrical"—meaning that the director has been more concerned with the performances than with discussing his theory of cinema—or "old-fashioned," as distinct from the thin cold formalism that he regards as up-to-date. If Griffith or Keaton or Jean Vigo were starting their work now, the art-movie addict would be the last person to see their genius, for his responses operate years behind the real film lover's. He depends on a received idea of what is intellectual, or original, or entertaining, and to receive an idea takes time: the Bergman cult was fuelled to some extent by a feed-back from Cocteau, the American experimental movies that are beginning to turn into a rallying point at film festivals are riding on the back of *Shadows,* and probably even the art-movie fan would not have been able to make anything of *Carry on Nurse* if it had not come bumbling cheerfully along in the wake of the great days of Ealing.

The art movie is never a pioneer work in any real sense. This is not to say that it does not often indulge in a factitious sort of device-spinning that lards the piece with a look of newness and sends the art-cinema theorists into paroxysms of prose. I would think of Alain Resnais' *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad* as a particularly high class example of this sort of invention. Like a lot of French avant-garde art now, it gives one a shifting sense that the authors started off by writing a critical appreciation of the work before getting around to creating it.

The town with the highest birth rate in Britain, Harlow New Town, has just set up a club of fifty-six members who are pledged to ban sex from marriage. Sex, they believe, is "below the practice of the human race;" if anyone wants children they can have them by artificial insemination, thereby conserving energy "to help to solve the world's economic and other problems." When one reads the art-cinema magazines, one sometimes feels that a project just as wild is under way. What randy cinemagoer is thinking to do anything so erotic as respond to films, when

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he could be studying frigid pieces about the metaphysic of *Virgin Spring* or helping to solve the problem of *L'Avventura?* With a big enough membership, pleasure in cinema could be put down altogether.

The same creeping paralysis has also broken out in France, between the flabby covers of *Cahiers du Cinèma,* and it is beginning to get a foothold in America. Bemused by the self-effacing possibilities opened up by the English school, one languid American film magazine recently published a plodding synopsis of *L'Avventura* disguised as a notice. I am ready to believe that, if it had been more than indifferently written, it might have been a pleasant amble; as it was, it turned into one of the most futile pieces yet published about this key work of art cinema, which has induced more than its share of exasperating prose.

The bloodless indecision of Antonioni's film, which speaks volumes to its admirers, becomes more precious than ever when it is solemnly investigated in print. To begin with, the moral quest detected in the film turns into a more and more grotesque misapprehension, like the idea that *La Notte* has anything to do with the real texture of sexual feeling. Antonioni's characters know no more about pain than the groping of a sea anemone knows about love: the fact that they move about as though they have a ball and chain attached to their ankles is a sign of the director's temperament, not of their own depth or distress.

Because he leaves no trivia out, Antonioni's films have extraordinary physical weight: this the art-movie man characteristically takes for intellectual density. My own feeling is that he invests acts of dressing and door-shutting with more moral gravity than they can carry. By avoiding cut-aways and by letting his shots run on three times as long as anyone else, he creates a mood of pretty *accidie* that is emptily realized and simply not very interesting. Most directors, if they wanted to establish that a character had a bath, would think it enough to catch the taps being turned on, but Antonioni will show the insignificant process in full: the first pensive drift into the bathroom, the delay while the cold runs in, the doleful soaping of a jaded knee, the lull on the rim of the bath while a faint flicker of energy is mustered to do something else. If he were to photograph a hand in a restaurant playing with a pepper pot, art cinema audiences would swallow it whole as a subtle indication of the character's intellectual malaise.

Antonioni's success as the philosopher of art cinema is an amazing piece of dupery, but then the whole area is a playground for confidence tricks. His achievement is as a mood man, like Katherine Mansfield. What seems to be the harrowing thought of his characters is really the harrowing sloth of his style.

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John Henry Raleigh

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*Patriotic Gore**—the phrase is from "Maryland! My Maryland!" and the subject is the civil war—is Edmund Wilson's final large-scale assessment of history in general and American history in particular and the literature, defined in the widest sense, that came out of that conflict. As it is the product of a distinguished mind and years of labor, it is worth the serious attention of every student of these subjects. It makes no pretense of being "neutral" or "objective" although it strives mightily to get at the real meaning of the Civil War; it is rather the impassioned comment of a single individual, historian, literary critic, moralist, rhetorician, on the great American tragedy, the existence of slavery, the fratricidal conflict and its continuing aftermath. The finest compliment that one can pay it is to say that only Edmund Wilson could have written it. It is not without its slower moments, still less of its irritating ones; and at times you think that only Edmund Wilson *would* have written it. But it is so good, and, despite its complexities and contradictions, so much all of a piece, the product of a single, complicated, learned, tenacious, and sensitive mind, that even its crotchets, which come out of an old American cracker barrel, are part of the total value. It is a curious book too in that, in some way that is difficult to explain, it is "unfinished," by which I mean that the author does not fit all the parts together, as, for example, he did at the end of *To the Finland Station,* where the historical key fits the historical lock and a book, *Das Kapital,* becomes history. In this book the original conflict is still going on, and separate parts of the argument, at least to me, seem to run into one another. (For example, Alexander Stephens, the Vice-President of the Confederacy, is apotheosized as the upholder of human freedom, and the foe of Absolutism; in other parts of the book the degradation of slavery, for both Negro and white, is concretely and unforgettably

* PATRIOTIC GORE, By Edmund Wilson, Oxford University Press, $8.50.

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documented; yet it was Alexander Stephens who when the Confederacy was formed proposed openly and frankly to base it on slavery.) It is "unfinished" too in the sense that one feels that the author, only too aware of the complexities of the subject, purposely left the book "open." On that unanswerable but quite legitimate question: should it all have happened anyway? Mr. Wilson poses a series of rhetorical questions:

> Could this nasty situation have been averted? Should the war not have been earlier brought to an end? Could it not, in fact, have been prevented? Should Fort Sumter have been relieved? Would it not have been a good deal less disastrous if the South had been allowed to secede?

As a states-rights man Mr. Wilson's answer to all that is implied here is "yes," but still the question marks remain. Further even if the answer is "yes," the other, more terrible problem and curse, slavery, remains unsolved. It is then the kind of a book that the author could take up again in a few years and by a few changes here and there give to it a quite different emphasis and direction, so delicately poised—in the book as a whole, not in the introduction—is it on the edges of so many abysses and intolerable problems. It has been said that no civil conflict ever ends, no matter who wins. Even where the issues are no longer relevant to contemporary society, as in the English civil wars, the historians go marching on. In such civil convulsions as the French Revolution and the American Civil War the consequences are still working themselves out, and the agony of the initial and actual conflict stretches itself out over the decades and into another century. To this "agony," past and present, *Patriotic Gore* is a literary testament.

Patriotic Gore is composed of two complementary strands: it is part literary history and criticism; and part history-protest-dirge. One of the theses about the literature of the Civil War is that such was the stress of the period that the pain and the problems enforced themselves on people, diarists as well as creative writers, so powerfully that it almost seemed as if an unseen hand were dictating the composition. The prime example of course of this hermetic aspect of the culture of the war period is Mrs. Stowe, who said that "God" wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A less obvious example is Francis Grierson's *The Valley of Shadows* (1909), one of Mr. Wilson's many discoveries. Grierson was an incredible character, a poor Mid-Western boy who became a rather celebrated *fin de siécle* cosmopolite, pianist, essayist, mystic, and also celebrator of the great Americans like Lincoln and

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Whitman. *The Valley of Shadows* is his retrospective account of what it was like in the Mid-West during the ominous fifties. Mr. Wilson says that *Uncle Tom* and *The Valley of Shadows* contain "certain striking features in common" and that they had both been "forced into being" by the passionate fifties, one during and one after. Moreover, this same hermetic aspect worked on human materials as well, forcing them upward, notably Grant, who, by this book, is permanently rehabilitated as an admirable man and a superior writer, if a completely inadequate President.

One of the best chapters in the book is about Grant as a man, as a general, and as a writer. It all winds up to a magnificent conclusion which is both finely written and an eminently fitting conclusion for the story of Grant. It follows a description of Grant meeting Bismarck.

> For the boy from the two-room cabin, who had not wanted to go to West Point and who had hoped that it would be abolished in order that he might not have to finish there, who had had, he said, "a horror" of the Mexican War in which he had been forced to serve, believing it to be "most unjust," who had taken to drink and, discharged from the army, had gone to clerking in his brothers' leather store, who could not bear the sight of blood nor even face a steak not well done, and who said he much preferred farming to fighting—this man had found himself, in his forties, the most conspicuous figure in what had been up to that time the most destructive war in history and afterward at the head of the formidable state which this war had consolidated; the equal, the sympathetic colleague, of the master of that other great new state which had consolidated the German principalities.

A product of this rise was Grant's *Memoirs,* which as Mark Twain first said and, as Mr. Wilson agrees, should stand with the classic war memoirs in Western culture.

In fact it is "literature" of this order, Grant's *Memoirs,* Mrs. Chestnut's diaries, Mosby's recollections, that, as presented by Mr. Wilson anyway, are the most powerful documents to come out of the conflict.

If we think of poetry as the most compressed and the most "literary" of verbal expressions, this is where the literature of the Civil War period is the most impoverished, some of Whitman excepted. The weakest chapter in this book is that concerned with the poetry of the War. First, Mr. Wilson is not at his best anyway in dealing with verse, in fact, at times seems to lose interest; second, the poetry itself that came directly out of the War, as Mr. Wilson says, makes "barren reading;" but, third, he does try manfully, and unsuccessfully, to make of Sidney Lanier a poet to be given serious consideration; and

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he brings in people like Emily Dickinson, Tuckerman, and Pound, not to mention Jefferson's architecture and Audubon's plates and some prose of Henry James, none of which had much to do with the War experience in any direct sense. It is all, of course, interesting, but it is also desultory.

With the novel the quality goes up considerably, although never reaching authentic greatness. But until this book anyway much of it has been under-rated, generally speaking, especially people like Cable and Tourgée. Even if flawed artistically, these books are fascinating as sociology. It is true that most all of them have some fundamental defect. Even De Forest, after Mrs. Stowe one of the best, suffers from a "fundamental non-radiation," as Mr. Wilson says. And of course underneath these writers is a vast flat-land containing scores of "ole" plantations among the roses in the moonlight. One wonders why Mr. Wilson left out Harold Frederic's *The Copperhead,* which he has written about before, and only incidentally brings in James' *The Bostonians* whose male protaganist is indubitably and admirably a post Civil War Southern gentleman. The addition of these two would certainly have strengthened the claim for the merit of Civil War fiction.

But if the literature generally constantly tended to be tepid, life was not, nor were the people who lived it, nor were the written documents that they produced and the prose which they wrote, nor are the reconstructions of their lives by Mr. Wilson, whose moving account of the lives of Calvin and Harriet Beecher Stowe is better than anything that Thomas Nelson Page or Albion Tourgée ever wrote. For insight into character it certainly surpasses De Forest. Here, in the life of the Stowes, amidst constant and terrible religious pressures, continuous labor, enforced separations, years of constant poverty, all presided over by a tormented honesty and a passionate love that can never be divorced from a sense of righteousness, was the real life of the times, Northern ex-Calvinist variety. Some of its many qualities can be given by sample extracts from Calvin Stowe's letters to his wife:

> Let me have a competent salary, let me be permitted to study and teach and lecture every day, let me have my dear little children around me every evening, and let me sleep in my own bed with my good wife every night, and Prince Albert himself is not so happy a man as I.

But (same letter):

> No man can love and respect his wife more than I do mine. Yet we are not as happy as we might be. I have many faults, and you have some failings, ...

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And (same letter):

> Bless the Lord, O my soul, that with all my strong relish for brandy and wine, and all my indescribable admiration and most overflowing delight in handsome young ladies, no offenses of this kind [he had been writing about lapses among the clergy] have yet been written down against me in God's book.

In another letter to her:

> You should be as regular in the kitchen as in the garden. I suffer amazingly every day I live.

On and on it goes, this passionately devoted man and wife, examining their consciences, pointing out weaknesses, and wrestling—daily, visibly—with the forces of Evil. All his life Calvin Stowe underwent hallucinations, usually devilish, and once, like Luther, actually routed the Devil by shouting at him some things from *Ephesians*: "I tell you it made him bark like a dog, and he took himself off. He won't trouble me again." Or, to go to the other extreme, the life of amorphous homosexual Francis Grierson is certainly more striking and "original" than the destiny of any fictional character of the time.

To move to the Southern side, Mrs. Stowe herself wrote no more gruesome indictment of slavery, again on Negro and white alike, than did Mrs. Chestnut, an aristocratic and intelligent North Carolinian who moved in the highest Confederate circles and kept a diary. In fact Mrs. Chestnut thought that Mrs. Stowe had missed the most telling argument, the sexual horrors of slavery that no one ever mentioned:

> Under slavery, we live surrounded by prostitutes, yet an abandoned woman [a white one, she means] is sent out of a decent house. Who thinks any worse of a Negro or mulatto woman for being a thing we can't name. God forgive us, but ours is a monstrous system and an iniquity! . . . .

And what is a plantation owner:

> A magnate who runs a hideous black harem with its consequences under the same roof with his lovely white wife, and his beautiful and accomplished daughters? He holds his head as high and poses as the model of all human virtues to those poor women whom God and the laws have given him. From the height of his awful majesty, he scolds and thunders at them as if he never did wrong in his life. Fancy such a man finding his daughter reading *Don Juan*. 'You with that im-

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moral book!' And he orders her out of his sight. You see, Mrs. Stowe did not hit the sorest spot. She makes Legree a bachelor.

In these people and their documents there is a "literature" which rivals the real literature of the period, *Uncle Tom* and a few other works excepted. Mr. Wilson makes however, several brilliant analogies to the work of an American creative writer of genius, namely Melville. Anyone who has studied *Moby Dick* and becomes aware of its tremendous stresses and strains, its sense of implacable opposites and an impending doom, its flights and counterflights, its descents into the sea, and its contemplation of the Milky Way, is intuitively convinced that this somehow is *the* literary document of the Civil War, a kind of uncanny prophecy in art of what was to come in life. Mr. Wilson apologizes for adding to "the bizarre interpretations" already offered of *Moby Dick,* but goes on to say that in reading Grant's *Memoirs,* concerning his final pursuit of Lee, one is inescapably reminded of Ahab's quest. Grant had served with Lee in Mexico and knew, as he said, that Lee was mortal. They were the two great leaders of their respective sides and their final confrontation was a great national drama. When at last they do meet at Appomattox, it seems as if:

> . . . Ahab, stubborn, intent, and tough, crippled by his wooden leg as Grant had sometimes been by his alcoholic habits, will confront the smooth and shimmering foe, who so far eluded all hunters. . . .

Then in 1866 in a book of verse Melville published a narrative poem, *The Scout Toward Aldie,* which was about Mosby, the famous Confederate raider, and his entrapment and destruction of a young Union officer:

> What we recognize, of course, in this story is Melville's familiar theme: the pursuit or the persecution by one body of another, with an ambivalent relation between them which mingles repulsion and attraction but which binds them inescapably together: Captain Ahab and Moby Dick, Claggart and Billy Budd, Babo and Don Benito.

Finally, the best purely literary analysis in the book is the long, complex, and wide-ranging analysis of the effect of the Civil War upon American prose. It is impossible to summarize except to say that Mr. Wilson accounts for *both* Abraham Lincoln and Henry James.

The great merit of all of Mr. Wilson's reconstructions and criticisms consists in bringing to light, lucidly and sympathetically, all these much neglected and quite wonderful documents of the time, known of course

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to specialists in the history and literature of the period, but not to the general reader. So various are they that they qualify Mr. Wilson's own historical argument—which is another matter—and in their totality give about as complex and various a picture of what the Civil War meant to the generation that lived through it as has ever been put between the covers of one book. The second great merit is the psychological understanding of the author, who, while allowing his "characters" to speak for themselves in great part, has arranged and highlighted their words with such skill and provided such lucid and luminous connecting passages, expositions, and comments that they all come alive as do few of the characters of even Mrs. Stowe and De Forest. The characterization of Sherman, for example, is one of great tact, and in him and his family is embodied the modern psychological equivalent to the Biblical injunction that the sins of the fathers are visited on the sons. Somehow there is made a telling connection between Sherman's march through Georgia wherein he exalted the lust to dominate and gloried in the beauty of war, and the awful fate of his son, a Catholic priest who finally went insane but who before being actually put away gave unmistakable signs of imagining himself as a commanding officer.

As for the other aspect of the book, history-protest-dirge: the history is the history of the Civil War; the protest is against modern centralization; and the dirge is for the lost aristocratic-republican traditions of America, namely the Old South, Virginia and New England. The historical argument breaks down into two parts: the introduction and the book as a whole. The introduction, which is probably by now notorious—at least it's already been attacked by the editors of *Life*—is completely deterministic and sees all wars as equal, be it the North defeating the South or the Allies defeating Hitler, and man himself as a sea-slug who voraciously devours anything that comes his way.

There are all kinds of things to argue with in the Introduction. I will confine myself to making some remarks on the idea that the Civil War was but another instance of American "imperialism." To at least one acute contemporary English observer, Lord Acton, it seemed that the North did not follow the age-old imperialistic pattern. Acton was a close and astute student of American history and institutions and, especially, of the Civil War. He shared the enthusiasm of the English aristocracy for the cause of the South, not for snobbish reasons, but because he was a confirmed states-rights man who thought that by the federal system the United States had solved the problem of power and that the Civil War threatened this system. As for slavery, he thought

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that it was disappearing in the Western world and that it would eventually disappear in the South. When the war was over, he wrote to Lee as follows:

> Therefore I deemed that you were fighting the battle of our liberty, our progress, and our civilization; and I mourn for the stake which was lost at Richmond more deeply than I rejoice over that which was saved at Waterloo.

Now on the basis of his knowledge of history, which was probably the most extensive of any man of his time, Acton expected two things to happen after the Northern victory: first, something drastic would be done to the Southern leaders and, second, the victorious North would go on to take over Latin America. It is true that both Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens suffered incarceration, humiliation, and pain, as Mr. Wilson points out. But they were both finally set free. To Acton this came as a refreshing difference; ". . . while European monarchs suppressed revolution with atrocious cruelty, Jefferson Davis had been released by the great Republic." When Maximilian, Napoleon's abandoned puppet in Mexico, was executed in 1867 Acton prophesied:

> Nothing henceforth remains that can permanently arrest the United States in the annexation of Spanish America. If they have the prudence to avoid European war, and wisdom to compose their own dissensions, they may grasp the most glorious inheritance the earth affords.

He did go on to say that this annexation would probably be done not by rule or incorporation but rather by treaty, and there are no doubt valid arguments to say that it was done anyway, eventually and economically. Still this does not weaken the argument that what Lord Acton expected—a strong power immediately taking over weaker neighbors—did not happen. All of American history seems to show that the fundamental ethos, despite expeditions in the services of greed, is non-imperialistic in a sense that would have been incomprehensible to a Roman bureaucrat and probably now is to a Russian bureaucrat. And there has never been any mystique about an historic mission to subdue the world, as there was in Rome and as there is in Russia. And to one learned observer, anyway, of the Civil War, its course was not easily predictable in the light of past imperialisms.

The internal argument of *Patriotic Gore* echoes the introduction in places but in a much more subtle fashion. It's all very complicated and I am oversimplifying, but it goes something like this: the lust to domin-

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ate arose in the North from a variety of sources all of which tended to mask themselves with a moral pretense: the Abolitionists with their Calvinism; Lincoln with his historical mission to save the Union; the money-grabbers and power seekers mouthing platitudes as they built up the machine. Even the most well intentioned of these people were somehow infected by what Mr. Wilson thinks is the great modern intolerance, the idea that history is on your side. The result was two disasters: the destruction of the South and the centralization of the North: under a Washington bureaucracy during the War and a Wall Street oligarchy shortly thereafter. Opposed to these power drives were certain Southerners, notably Alexander Stephens, who fought against "the Demon of Centralism, Absolutism," in the name and principle of states rights. Stephens even opposed the centralization of the Southern government, though it meant losing the war.

The dramatic climax of this argument comes in the description of the meeting between Lincoln and Stephens at Fort Monroe in 1865, at a conference arranged by intermediaries in order to see if a peace could be worked out. It was not, but here at last was the confrontation of "two opposite moral political poles." Lincoln was the man of destiny, the self-appointed leader who "hunts as one of the pack." Stephens is usually "at odds with the pack." To put it another way: Lincoln collaborates with history, while Stephens opposes it.

At this point too the book becomes a protest against all the tendencies of modern culture:

> This issue presses hard on our time. There are moments when one may wonder today—as one's living becomes more and more hampered by the exactions of centralized bureaucracies of both the state and the federal authorities—whether it may not be true, as Stephens says, that the cause of the South is the cause of us all.

From all this follows the dirge, which is a lament for the three American traditions that were wiped out or permanently damaged either by the War itself or by the consequences of the War: the old South, (Stephens); Virginia (Lee); and New England Brahminism (Oliver Wendell Holmes). I give this whole argument of the book only to conclude by saying that the best single statement on the Civil War is still Lincoln's, from his message to Congress on December 1, 1862: "Without slavery the rebellion could never have existed; without slavery it could not continue."

But *Patriotic Gore* is not only a history and a lament, it is also a moral tract. If the enemy is history itself, and those who collaborate

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with it, the heroes are single men who either oppose it or in some fashion manage to step outside of it. Stephens, who opposes it, is described as an "impossibilist," one who cares nothing for consequences, who always carries his ideals to extremes, who would rather lay down his arms than adopt those methods of his enemy of which he disapproves. For one who steps aside, so to speak, there is Oliver Wendell Holmes, characterized as a "jobbist," the man with an ideal of excellence "which is not to save others but to justify oneself," and who works at his profession, "without trying to improve the world or to make an impression." I don't suppose any author has ever put these two men, Stephens and Holmes, side-by-side before, yet, as presented here, they certainly possess a generic resemblance. Both were long-lived, and long-lived in a special way, almost by an act of the will. Physically, Stephens was an ailing, aching shell most of his life, while Holmes, having great bodily vigor, had yet to push himself through recovery from the severe wounds he suffered in the Civil War. Both had an astringent, pessimistic, stoical outlook on life and men. Both were tough-minded and intransigent. If Holmes had fought in the Civil War, he finally came to disapprove of it and its consequences. In his later years he never read newspapers and was detached from contemporary life. Both men had served the Republic in a deeper sense than most of the other major figures in the book: the one by asserting an absolute ideal, the other by devoting himself to the services of the Supreme Court. Above all, both were the end-point of a noble tradition. When Stephens died, there died with him:

> . . . the South of Jefferson and Madison, of Randolph, Calhoun and Clay; of the landowners' and merchants' republic, of the balance of power in Congress, of the great collaboration and the great debates.

Holmes represented the Brahmin tradition of New England with its ideal of public service and its commitment to learning, released, in Holmes' case, from what Mr. Wilson regards as the great liability of historical New England culture, a belief in Calvinism with its resultant moral intolerance and a penchant for thinking one's own notions of right and wrong constitute categorical imperatives for the rest of the universe.

The third hero, not discussed in such detail and I think purposely kept at more of a distance, is Robert E. Lee, who belongs "as does no other public figure of his generation, to the Roman phase of the Republic." With Lee then the Revolutionary War generation comes into the picture. Lee was the legitimate heir of Washington and of the

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Virginia tradition, of that "classical antique virtue, at once aristocratic and republican . . ." And perhaps finally it is Lee, rather than Stephens, who is Holmes' proper counterpart: the last Virginian and the last Brahmin are alike in that they inspire a feeling of "awe" in their role of "republican Romans"—"Justice Holmes was perhaps the last Roman."

Whatever may be the arguments about the Civil War, its causes and consequences, whether or not it should have happened, whether its centralizing tendencies were beneficent (Allen Nevins) or harmful (Wilson), and so on—all these issues are endlessly debatable and will never be settled decisively. It is, however, a pragmatic fact that two noble traditions once did exist in the United States and, for whatever reasons and the Civil War is certainly one of them, no longer do. (Readers of Mr. Wilson's other works are familiar with his patriotic devotion to them and will regret that Lincoln is no longer in the pantheon, as do I, but I think he is not, among other reasons, for the very fact that he is more a unique individual and less a vessel for a tradition.) It is a fact too that these traditions at times produced superior individuals, through the aristocratic ethos of the South and through the moral-intellectual-public service ethos of New England, along with, be it admitted, pretense and hypocrisy in weaker souls. (Maybe it's worth a thousand hypocrites to get one great man.) My own preference would be for what New England used to represent, but that Lee was an authentically great man is again historical fact. At the outbreak of the War, and before Lee resigned from the American Army, General Winfield Scott, with Lincoln's concurrence, wished to make him Commanding General of the Union Armies. This is perhaps unparalleled in civil strife, that a soldier was offered the command of one faction and then went on to command the other, without the least hint or breath of his being in any sense a time-server or turn-coat. Lee knew too that he was choosing the losing side, and he detested both slavery and secession. Holmes in his way, and in terms of his values, possessed this same natural superiority and resolute steadfastness.

At its heart then *Patriotic Gore,* besides being all kinds of other things, and I have hardly done it justice, is an act of patriotism, a historical reminder not only of the great hopes of the original Republic but of the great men who lived its ideals. If these men are draped with robes that glow with a kind of supernal light, that is all right too because this is what an epic is supposed to do: to present the national life and purposes at their highest pitch and enveloped in

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poetry. Further, as *Patriotic Gore* demonstrates, the traditions *were* real too; Sherman himself said that the Southern "knight" was not a myth: "they are the most dangerous set of men that this war has turned loose upon the world. They are splendid riders, first-rate shots, and utterly reckless."

So far as I know, there is nothing else in American literature quite like *Patriotic Gore*. Whatever its inconsistencies or irrascibilities or impossibilities, it stands, in all its fine prose and wide range, as an eloquent rebuke to the poor writing and the narrow specialization of so much current literary and historical studies. This complaint about specialization and poor writing has been made so often in recent years that it has now become fashionable, a veritable "cliché complaint" in our fast-moving age when today's insight is tomorrow's platitude and when the sociologists' reports are hardly off the drawing boards before they have to be up-dated and revised. But as everybody says it, piously and fashionably, Mr. Wilson is in the unique position of having actually done something about it. What a relief to read a book that is beautifully written, that you can argue with all the way through, and that poses some national ideals. As for a world of "impossibilists" and "jobbists," this is worth a try too.

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BOOKS

VIRTUOSITY REWARDED, OR DR. KINBOTE'S REVENGE

PALE FIRE. By Vladimir Nabokov. Putnam. $5.00.

Except possibly for *Youngblood Hawke,* this is the most unreadable novel I've attempted this season. Mr. Nabokov's impenetrability is a negative print of Mr. Wouk's; the latter is not clever enough, but the former is too clever by half. This British locution is, of course, not only philistine but also false: one cannot be too clever any more than one can be too rich or too virtuous, and one of the few racial defects of the English is—or used to be until recent years, when brains have become fashionable everywhere, even in London—that they suspect cleverness per se; thus Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain were trusted (up to 1940) and Winston Churchill was not, and thus Max Beerbohm, who had one of the clearest and most original minds of his period, was never taken seriously. Still, there is a legitimate complaint against cleverness and that is when it becomes disconnected from meaning, when the virtuoso becomes so proficient at his instrument that his delight in showing off its qualities goes beyond the artistic purposes technique is supposed to serve.

Mr. Nabokov is a stylistic virtuoso who is all the more remarkable because English is not his native tongue. He is often compared to Conrad, but the comparison is unfair to both writers: to Nabokov because he can sound a greater range of notes; to Conrad because the few he did sound were major. Nabokov is a minor writer, by which I intend no insult; so is Herrick compared to Donne, Austen to Dickens, Gogol to Tolstoy, Frost to Yeats or Eliot. It's a matter of scope rather than quality, and while a writer who successfully tackles large themes is more important than one whose ambitions are more restricted—otherwise there would be no point in the major-minor distinction—a good minor writer is much to be preferred to such writers as Wells, Galsworthy, Bennett and—coming down an octave or

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two—Mrs. Humphrey Ward, to name some failed major writers of a conveniently distant time and place. It is our romantic prejudice in favor of the extensive, indeed of the infinite, with its concomitant nonsense about "genius," that leads us to over-value the big push. Homer was a great poet but Theocritus wasn't bad either. And it is striking that while Saul Bellow and Norman Mailer, to name our two best novelists of the middle generation, may some day produce a major novel, their best things so far have not been such ambitious efforts as *The Adventures of Augie March* and *The Naked and the Dead* but relatively minor pieces like *Seize the Day* and *The Man Who Studied Yoga.*

There is no need, then, to commiserate Mr. Nabokov because his successful works to date fall into the minor category. (Muriel Spark is another modern instance of the minor key being beautifully played.) He has written one small masterpiece, *Lolita,* which combines comedy —high and low—social satire, feeling, and an exuberance of mood and language that has rarely been displayed in our literature since the Elizabethans and Laurence Sterne.* He has also written three other excellent works: the stories about Mr. Pnin; the little book on Gogol, which is the best introduction to that marvelous writer I know, since it is as idiosyncratic as its subject and in much the same way; and his memoir of his early life, *Conclusive Evidence,* shimmering with nostalgia and wit.

The reviews I've seen of *Pale Fire* have been cautiously unfavorable, the caution being due to Mr. Nabokov's literary reputation—and also to the fact his last book was a best-seller.** They give the misleading impression that, despite reservations, the book is fun to read, full of "Quips and cranks and wanton wiles/Nods and becks and wreathed smiles." But it isn't fun. In fact, it is precisely its pervasive

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* On feeling, the quality most often denied to *Lolita*: Lionel Trilling overdid it when he insisted that love is its main theme, but he was right to see that Humbert Humbert's yen for his nymphet went much deeper than lust or perversion. Cf. the moving penultimate episode when Humbert confronts the aged—i.e., 17-year-old—and married Lolita. Or the earlier sentence (p. 177) in which Humbert summarizes it all: "And I catch myself thinking today that our long journey had only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country that by then, in retrospect, was no more to us than a collection of dog-eared maps, ruined tour books, old tires, and her sobs in the night—every night, every night—the moment I feigned sleep."

** An interesting exception was the flatly hostile article (by the British critic, George Cloyne) in the *N.Y. Times Book Review*, a weekly not celebrated for denigration, especially on its front page.

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archness and whimsicality that puts one off. Nagged on by professional duty, I did stagger on to the end, like a sober man trudging through the confetti and festoons of an interminable mardi gras. It seemed to me high-class doodling like *Invitation to a Beheading* and one or two other of Mr. Nabokov's earlier books, as boring as any exhibition of virtuosity disconnected from feeling and thought—Mr. Cloyne justly complains of the author's "self-imposed limitations" in both these departments. I also sensed a perverse bravado, as if the author, with a superior smile, is saying to the large public that read *Lolita*: "So you think I'm a manufacturer of best-sellers? Try *this* on your pianola!" I must confess I find this attitude, if not its product, attractive.

Pale Fire is in four unequal parts: a poem with that title supposed to have been written by John Francis Shade, an eminent and elderly poet who is in residence at an American university not unlike Cornell, where Mr. Nabokov taught for some years—the only alive parts of the book are the satirical glimpses of American academic life—and a foreword, commentary and index by Charles Kinbote, a colleague at the same institution. The poem is thirty-nine pages long, the foreword fourteen, the index eleven, and the commentary two hundred and twenty-eight. Dr. Kinbote advises the reader to read his commentary before reading the poem. High jinks. I did so, was bored, shifted to the poem, was bored, etc., like an insomniac restlessly seeking a more comfortable position. The most that can be said for the poem is that it is often good pastiche (though more often doggerel). Pope and Swift are wittily echoed:

> *The light is good; The reading-lamp long-necked;*
> *All doors have keys. Your modern architect*
> *Is in collusion with psychoanalysts:*
> *When planning parents' bedrooms, he insists*
> *On lockless doors so that, when looking back,*
> *The future patient of the future quack*
> *May find, all set for him, the Primal Scene.*

And the seventeenth century metaphysical poets—who also often pushed virtuosity too far—are skillfully imitated:

> *And then the black night. That blackness was sublime.*
> *I felt distributed through space and time:*
> *One foot upon a mountaintop, one hand*
> *Under the pebbles of a panting strand,*
> *One ear in Italy, one eye in Spain,*
> *In caves, my blood, and in the stars, my brain.*

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There were dull throbs in my Triassic; green
Optical spots in Upper Pleistocene,
An icy shiver down my Age of Stone,
And all tomorrows in my funnybone.

But the torrent of virtuosity deafens one to whatever meaning the poet may have been trying to communicate. "It's clever—but is it art?" as an earlier and more brilliant verse technician asked.

The raison d'etre of the book is the commentary. This spins a tale, which I found as interesting as the wedding guest did the ancient mariner's, about the king of a contemporary country called Zembla who, after many adventures, escapes his Extremist (Communist) assasins and arrives at a provincial American university masquerading as Dr. Kinbote. (The adventures, and the lengthy excursions into Zemblan customs and court life, were tedious because the author has not thought or felt his way into his imaginary country as, say, Swift and More and Samuel Butler did into theirs, and this is because he uses Zembla not to convey some meaning about life or politics but merely as a large piece in the puzzle-picture which the book is.) Dr. Kinbote becomes a close friend of his colleague, John Shade, and Shade writes a poem which Kinbote assumes is about Zembla and its refugee king, since he has thoroughly briefed the poet on these subjects. The poem and the poet's life are ended by the bullets of an incompetent Extremist gunman, who has tracked the king to the university and who aims at Kinbote but hits Shade. Kinbote, who has gotten possession of Shade's manuscript in the minutes preceding the murder, publishes it with his forward, index and commentary. It becomes clear, as one reads the commentary, that Kinbote is really a lunatic, that he was not a friend of Shade, who has been tolerating him uneasily, that the poem has nothing to do with Zembla or Charles the Beloved, topics which were doubtless as boring to Shade as they are to the reader, and that the assassin was in fact a lunatic who had mistaken Shade for Judge Goldworthy, Shade's next-door neighbor and Kinbote's absentee landlord, who had sent the assassin to prison. The skill with which the author, speaking always through Kinbote, manages to let these cats out of his capacious bag without ever damaging the structure of Kinbote's paranoiac fantasy, this must be admired. But, not I think, applauded. For the technical exertions he expends on the project are so obtrusive as to destroy any esthetic pleasure on the reader's part. His chief device, for instance, is a parody of academic method: Dr. Kinbote's line-by-line commentary, which is more than five times as long as the poem, uses the most far-fetched interpreta-

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tions to wrench everything into a Zemblan context. High jinks—but how elaborate can a joke be? Two hundred and twenty-eight pages is just too much. I am no foe of parody, but this parody seemed to me almost as boring as its object; one soon begins to suspect that the parodist has more in common with the parodee than he will admit, or perhaps than he is aware of. He, too, enjoys the game and so what he has produced, in this garrulous commentary ("The wedding guest here beat his breast/For he heard the loud bassoon") is more pastiche than parody. His ingenuity is as much misplaced as that of the Kinbotean pedants he thinks he is satirizing. He has looked too long into the abyss and, as Nietzsche warned, the abyss is now looking into *him*.

The abyss took a look in a recent *Encounter* in which Mr. Nabokov published fifteen close-printed pages on "Pushkin and Gannibal"—Pushkin's African great-grandfather—which reads like a parody of American scholarly research: a clotted mass of trivial data whose cautious academic prose contrasts painfully with the wit, the grace, the impudent clever aperçus of the same author's *Gogol*. But stay! *Is* it the same author? Do we perhaps have a case of demonic possession? Should we now speak of Vladimir Kinbote? Surely he is the author of *Pale Fire* and of "Pushkin and Gannibal"!

I was just finishing this review when Mary McCarthy's lengthy celebration of *Pale Fire* appeared in the June 4 *New Republic*. I respect greatly her critical acumen, but in this case I am unable to explain her enthusiasm except by the hypothesis that she enjoys solving double crostics more than I do, and in fact that she thinks they are a form of literature. Her review is five pages long and is practically all devoted to scholastic detective-work of the most elaborate kind. Literary criticism —that is, evaluation—is confined to the final paragraph, which seems stuck on as if she realized it was necessary to justify, however briefly, the preceding four and fourteen-fifteenths pages of exegesis:

> In any case, this centaur-work of Nabokov's half poem, half prose, this merman of the deep, is a creation of perfect beauty, symmetry, strangeness, originality and moral truth. Pretending to be a curio, it cannot disguise the fact that it is one of the very great works of art of this century, the modern novel that every one thought dead and that was only playing possum.

This seems to me unconvincing. Without quibbling about "half poem, half prose" when the proportions are rather one to five—that merman has scales right up to his neck—I am unable to find either in the book

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or in Miss McCarthy's review the referents for her sweeping value judgments: "creation of perfect beauty, symmetry, strangeness, originality, and moral truth. . . . one of the very great works of art of this century." Her exegetical effort is a formidable one—though it is disturbing to find her attributing to Wordsworth the well-known tag from Shelley's *Adonais*: "Life like a dome of many-colored glass/Stains the white radiance of eternity,"—and also to find her, as a letter in *The New Republic* notes, changing "white" to "pale"—she has been speculating on the book's title. Miss McCarthy couldn't find "pale fire" in Shakespeare, though Shade's poem indicates it's there, nor could I. But Mr. Nabokov in an interview says it is from *Timon of Athens,* and so it is; in Act IV, Scene 3: "The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction/Robs the vast sea; the moon's an arrant thief/And her pale fire she snatches from the sun." The reference to Kinbote's academic rape of Shade's poem is, as we say, unmistakeable. (The exegetical itch is catching.) But explaining a work of art is one thing and critically evaluating it is another. I'm afraid that like the book, Miss McCarthy's review seems to me an exercise in misplaced ingenuity. I finished it with the uneasy feeling that she, like Mr. Nabokov, had fallen into the pit that the pedantic Dr. Kinbote had digged.

Dwight Macdonald

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AIMEZ-VOUS AMERICA?

THE IMAGE, OR WHAT HAPPENED TO THE AMERICAN DREAM. By Daniel J. Boorstin. Atheneum. $5.
THE AMERICAN ESTABLISHMENT AND OTHER REPORTS, OPINIONS AND SPECULATIONS. By Richard H. Rovere, Harcourt, Brace and World. $4.95.

Nine years ago Daniel J. Boorstin, the distinguished American historian, wrote a book entitled *The Genius of American Politics,* in which he congratulated America on "the marvelous success and vitality of [her] institutions." He entitled his concluding chapter: "Our Cultural Hypochondria and How to Cure It." The *Zeitgeist* moves fast. In his new book Boorstin succumbs to the very hypochondria he proposed to cure. He has moved from the American Celebration to the American Nausea in nine short years.

This is a biting and incisive indictment of contemporary American culture. Mr. Boorstin holds that Americans have become so immersed in a world of manufactured "pseudo-events" that they have lost touch with the world they live in. Earlier commentators have already remarked upon the elaborate industry with which Americans shield themselves from the realities of death; Boorstin suggests that life has become as painful to us as death so that we have now blanketed it, too, with a make-believe world of our own construction, going through more and more complicated motions in order not to know ourselves.

In contemporary America, the reproduction of an event has become more "real" than the event itself. Boorstin reports a conversation between the mother of a young baby and an admiring friend: "My, that's a beautiful baby you have there." "Oh, that's nothing—you should see the photograph!" Whenever, he argues, a pseudo-event competes for attention with a spontaneous event, the pseudo-event will prevail. What happens on television will over-shadow what happens off television. Pseudo-events are more dramatic, more vivid, more intelligible and more reassuring than real events. They are more sociable, more "conversable" and easier to witness. And they predominate in consciousness simply because there are so many of them. Hence, by a new Gresham's law, the spurious and counterfeit drive the genuine out of circulation. Events that are planted primarily for the purpose of being reported or reproduced win out over events which occur spontaneously; the staged visit of a Pakistani camel driver with Vice-President Johnson, one recalls, got more attention than the plight of all the millions of Pakistani peasants combined.

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In the best chapter of his book, Boorstin contrasts the hero to the celebrity. The hero is a man or woman of great deeds. "The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knowness." He is neither good nor bad. All human qualities are leveled here, since the only common denominator which counts is whether one is a "big name." Hence the recently compiled *Celebrity Register* shows in alphabetical order Mortimer Adler followed by Polly Adler, the Dalai Lama listed beside TV comedienne Dagmar, Dwight Eisenhower preceding Anita Ekberg, Pope John XXIII coming after Mr. John the hat designer, and Bertrand Russell followed by Jane Russell.

The hero made himself; the celebrity is made by the media. And the celebrity, like a battery, needs continuously to be "recharged" by the media because the passage of time, which creates the hero, destroys the celebrity. The celebrity hence always must be anxiously concerned with staying in the news. Once the spotlight is turned off, he becomes *passé*; he is out of the picture. Whenever it is asked of someone "Whatever became of. . . ?" he is no longer a celebrity, in fact he is nothing. Thus, as Boorstin cleverly observes, the man who formerly needed a *private* secretary to build a barrier between himself and the public, nowadays needs a *press* secretary to keep him properly before the public eye. He who does not get into the synthetic news is irrevocably condemned to the commonplace station which should have been his in the first place. Absence of news about him creates the same horror and anxiety as an announcement of impending death. Boorstin recalls the *New Yorker* cartoon showing father and son leaving a movie house where they had just seen *The Spirit of St. Louis*. "If everyone thought what he did was so marvelous," the boy asks his father, "how come he never got famous?"

The modern American, his palate jaded by predictable pseudo-events, argues the author, has attempted to escape from the familiar to the exotic. This is the Age of Travel. But the tourist, as distinct from the traveler, has lost the capacity for real experience. The whole world now becomes for him a stage for pseudo-events. Foreign travel no longer involves an encounter with new experience, it has become innocuous as it comes in neatly packaged form; it becomes a commodity. "When the traveler's risks are insurable, he has become a tourist." On the packaged tour the natives are insulated from the tourists; they might otherwise be a source of moral or material contamination; and shipmates now replace them as a source of adventure. The best attractions are those travesties of rituals, folk festivals and the like which are put on for the benefit of the tourists in the best season and the

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most convenient hours. Only the spectacular festival where people obligingly mimic themselves can meet expectations. A Walt Disney Venice, it occurs to me, not too far removed from the real thing, complete with San Marco and the Campanile as well as pigeons, would be a spectacular success. The real Venice is too crowded, the canals smell bad, and sanitary conditions leave much to be desired. . .

Boorstin provides a first-rate phenomenology of American mass culture even though some of it may be overdrawn and there are occasional lapses into superficiality. He has the historian's sense of the telling detail, and his grounding in American history prevents him from succumbing to the fallacy of misplaced contemporaneity which is so conspicuous in vulgarizers such as Vance Packard. Boorstin knows that the flight from reality which he describes has some of its roots in historical experience.

This is clearly an important book. Why then is it finally not a fully satisfying one? I think the main reason is that Boorstin fails to give us any clues as to the causes of the phenomena he so insistently sets before our eyes. One finally wants to know why all this happens. Granted the utter depravity of popular taste, granted the allegedly widespread inability to accept or even recognize reality, what accounts for it all and what can be done about it? After he has given us on more than two hundred and fifty pages an anatomy of our modern hell, Boorstin ends with a page or so of somewhat pathetic exhortations. We should try to reach outside of our images, he says. We should listen to the messages from the past, from God, from the world. We should break through the wall of illusions. "Then we may know where we are, and each of us may decide for himself where he wants to go." This seems to me a startlingly disappointing conclusion. It fatally resembles the injunction of pre-Freudian psychiatry which tended to enjoin the suffering patient to "pull himself together and face reality." But what if he could not face reality because it was just too frightening for him to contemplate? What if the world of pseudo-events which Boorstin so acutely describes is yet preferred to the "real" reality because the latter is so threatening and anxiety-provoking that it must be shut out? Any psychoanalyst knows nowadays that neurotic symptoms perform important functions for the patient so that to "analyze them away" without changing the underlying "reality situation" may indeed lead to total breakdown. The symptom provides only substitute satisfaction, true enough. But even substitutes may help to maintain at least a precarious balance. I am not arguing here, of course, for the perpetuation of a pseudo-world of illusions, but rather for the idea so

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well put by the young Marx that "The demand that the people should shake itself free of illusions as to its own condition is the demand that it should abandon a condition which needs illusion." Boorstin fails to analyze or even depict the context in which the pseudo-reality which he so cogently describes has arisen. Since he does not refer to the conditions which need illusions, he can only come up with a few trite moralistic and hortatory remarks. In order to make this into a fully satisfying book, Boorstin would have had to re-examine "the marvelous success and vitality of [our] institutions." He would have had to talk of the horror of the arms race and the terror of the Bomb, of Communist successes and American blunders on the world scene, of bureaucratization and of alienation. But then a close look at *these* realities was perhaps a bit too much even for him.

The passing of time has deeply affected Boorstin's outlook; Richard H. Rovere, on the other hand, seems to believe that time has stood still. How else can he justify this book which consists in the main of reprints of topical pieces, some of them written more than ten years ago? Who cares now about his 1953 evaluation of Harold Ickes' *Secret Diaries*—which have been on the remainder shelves of bookstores for years? Why should one be moved nowadays to reread his 1948 account of Truman's and Dewey's campaign manners? Rovere is a very gifted journalist but he deludes himself into believing that what was once fresh and informative in the *New Yorker* can still pass muster in hard covers today. Parts of this book have an almost ghostly appearance. Harold Matuso, "the kept witness," Sherman Adams and the Vicuna coat, Peter Viereck's *The Shame of the Intellectuals*, Newbold Morris' brief attempt to "clean up the mess" in Washington—they seem all so far away now that it becomes difficult to believe that they once engaged our attention. Willkie, Vandenberg, MacArthur, Sidney Hillman —it all reminds one of the slightly musty air of a family album from way back.

My point is not, of course, directed against historiography. The fact is, however, that these are vivid and immediate responses to current events whereas good historiography is always mediated through subsequent historical experience and reinterpreted by being placed in a context wider than was immediately available to the contemporary observer. Slightly to retouch journalistic pieces just won't make them into examples of the historian's craft.

There are some good things in this book: a fine profile of an old-time New York district boss, done in the best *New Yorker* manner; an

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excellent appreciation of George Orwell; a perceptive discussion of C. W. Mills' *Power Elite*. But there is not nearly enough of it. There are also a few pieces in which Rovere attempts to be profound. These turn out to be merely highfalutin', embarrassing, and confused. What is one to make of a man who in an essay *On Political Sophistication* says on the first pages that "In politics, sophistication. . .is a supporting member, part of the foundation," only to say four pages later that "It is a curious feature of politics that it corrodes sophistication. . .?"

Rovere's political writing is a prime example of the liblab school of journalism. It seems that for him the more often one employs formulations like "on the one hand . . . but on the other hand," the nearer one approaches maturity and wisdom. "In recent years," he says, "Congressional committees have posed the largest single threat to [individual] freedom [of conscience];" but on the other hand, Arthur Miller when refusing to name some people he had met in Communist circles "was plainly in contempt." Caution is the hallmark of the liblab journalist. When he writes about Gunnar Myrdal, Rovere refers to him as "the author of *what is often said to be* the most comprehensive study ever made of race relations in the United States." (My emphasis. L.C.) *It is*, man it is!

This brings me to the title essay, by far the most interesting but also the most infuriating in the book. *The American Establishment* exhibits a classical case of political ambivalence. Freud defines ambivalence as a psychic state in which "the contrasting pair of impulses are developed in almost the same manner." This is plainly what Rovere suffers from. He is impressed and perturbed by the fact that a very high proportion of the political and social elite in contemporary America is drawn from a relatively small circle of graduates of Eastern colleges, of members of top law firms and the like. He is concerned about the major political roles played by a restricted elite composed of the directors of the Council on Foreign Relations, Foundation Executives, certain Washington and Harvard intellectuals and so on. But to write seriously about this would be very disquieting for the liblab conscience; it might even force it to re-examine some of the basic premises on which it rests. Hence Rovere chooses another way out; he uses humor to deny the conflict of values that he cannot face. He reveals some most interesting facts about the Establishment but then deliberately turns the whole thing into an elaborate hoax complete with fake footnotes and outrageously exaggerated and often ludicrous examples, so that the whole essay turns out to be a parody of writing about the elite. Rovere can continue to have the best of all possible worlds; he has

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lifted a wee bit the veil that hides the arcana of power, but has told us at the same time that this was all just good clean fun and he really didn't mean to offend. He deserves a place of honor in the Establishment.

Lewis Coser

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

ARSHILE GORKY, THE MAN, THE TIME, THE IDEA. By Harold Rosenberg. Horizon Press. $3.75.

This subtle and modest little book has a curious double dialectic. On the one hand, Gorky's biography, which Harold Rosenberg calls an "exemplary fable of the artist of our time," is fully developed as a working out of the world-history and art-history of 1920-1950; but on the other hand, the undercurrent and finally main current of argument is that the artist achieved his best work at the end quite outside of *that* history and very much like an artist of any age. I think that these two strands are contradictory. This does not prevent their both being importantly true, since the paradox of being trapped and therefore representative and indeed existing at all, and of escaping and becoming one's self and realizing some value, is in the nature of things. If Harold Rosenberg is here paradoxical, it is that he is wise; yet I doubt that he sees the contradiction altogether clearly, for he seems to identify with Gorky's weaknesses more than is necessary, and he takes the crazy details of current history too seriously as real history: they are real enough in that they may do us in, but they do not much recommend themselves for humane discourse. (One has the impression, too, that a kind of biographer's piety restrains the author from his fun, his pathos, and his indignation; this is too bad. And he is very sparing with "merely" personal information, though he gives enough, and frankly, for his purposes.)

Gorky is presented to us as a "modern" who dedicates himself to the development of the new style and styles as such, because " 'real' art belongs to . . . communions destroyed by our revolutionary age . . . but art is deathless and actually arises to new heights in becoming nothing else than the artist's experience of it." This, with its corollary of the looting of history and the international world, is "the basic premise of

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the art of this time." So Gorky engages in allusion, meticulously models "himself" on Cezanne, Picasso, Masson, Miro, etc. "In 1927 he took the logical step from Cezanne to Cubism indicated by the history of twentieth century art." It was the shift of his verbal consciousness into the formulas of psychological experiment and magic brought to these shores by the Surrealists at the beginning of World War II that released Gorky's hand for the radical creations of the final period." On the whole, our new art is a "newcomer's creation," made by immigrants and the sons of immigrants, etc. Likewise, a characteristic Rosenbergian theme is that real history is future. During the thirties, "Gorky anticipated the post-agitational era that gave birth to present-day American abstract art." "A vanguard *will* sufficed . . ." (Author's italics.) And in this sense we may interpret Gorky's absurd posing as the will to be an artist; and his life as working "to qualify as a vehicle of the evolution of art."

Yet toward the end of his book Rosenberg is really treating all this as mythology. Let me give two quotations. "Having rid himself of the ideology of art's next move, Gorky had become content to comb the beaches where passion and esthetic memories meet"—and this was his best period. And *The Diary of a Seducer,* which Rosenberg considers to be Gorky's best painting, "signifies simultaneously on the multiple levels of the esthetic, of nature, and of self-disclosure." I think that a candid reading of these two quotations will see them as succinct statements of classical art-theory, at least since the Renaissance and certainly in Roman antiquity or any Alexandrian period. Especially if we bear in mind Goethe's remark that he did not compose from experience but he tended to experience what he was going to compose. (This is better put by saying that both the experiencing and the composing spring from a common source.) Thus, through Gorky's strictly "modern" odyssey, Rosenberg lands us in a familiar and excellent harbor.

I am profoundly unimpressed, let me say, by Rosenberg's attempt to unite the two strands by explaining that it was the Surrealists of 1940 who, "only in person," could impart their conception of the free artist and so freed Gorky. I doubt that international hipsters like Breton and Matta accomplished any such spiritual miracles. Without any fancy psychologizing, it seems simpler to explain the artist's mature liberation in terms of his temporarily good marriage, getting a decent income, and a little public acceptance, and also by his rage of jealousy and fear of oncoming death; for these are the things that free us from obsessional self-consciousness and give the real self a chance to breathe. The biographer points out that previously, "Assertive as he was, he shrank from self-assertion and was timid in the face of what was uniquely his—a

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reticence not uncommon among creative egotists." Precisely; it is because there is a paucity, and anxious stifling, of the unknown self; and the substitution for it of willed roles, like being a vehicle of the evolution of art. Rosenberg says it neatly himself, "Gorky's devotion to painting probably went too deep; he was, one may suspect, taking shelter in art from the strange continent upon which he had been cast. . . . Deprived of a world of familiar things, he made art his universe, as does an immigrant the narrow routine of his shop. He stocked his studio with art supplies, as if he intended to hole up there for a siege." (Would free-booting surrealists help much in such a case?)

So I am uneasy about the following sentences: "At the right time he was in the right place. In the Bohemian twenties he inhabited a studio on Sullivan Street in Greenwich Village. The year of the Wall Street crash he moved to Union Square, where he remained throughout the decade of demonstrations, artists' unions, and government projects. The Depression at an end, he left the Square for Connecticut to become, amid the amenities of the International Set, an augur of the future prosperity of American art." *Were* those the right places? I can speak only for myself, but I can imagine lots of righter places. One might almost invert the sentence by saying, although he was in the wrong places, he sometimes made good, saving, choices.

Let me put this another way. We indeed have a miserable lack of community, of noble country, of authentic folk culture; in many crucial ways, we have been going through a bad period. It is also true that luck, scrupulous honesty, frank sensuality, the right use of the intellect, etc., allow for more community and grandeur than the Americans, including the American artists, generally dare. And in my opinion it is precisely this that makes possible the "meeting of passion and esthetic memories," for we find both that the older forms are humanly useful to us and that we can add to them. In this broader history, the porcupinishness of the modern art world is sometimes pretty boring.

Despite these big issues it raises, this is, I say, a lovely modest book. It praises but does not puff its subject, and it is not used to display the virtuosity of its author. As with all Rosenberg's criticism, I should have liked more exposition of the structure and idea of individual works, as well as the time and man; but on the other hand, there is nobody who gives a more relevant and disarmingly matter-of-fact account of the autonomous but not isolated world of the artists, couched in clear propositions.

Paul Goodman

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A RAID ON THE INARTICULATE

IN PARENTHESIS. By David Jones. New York, Chilmark Press. $5.75.

Historians like to point out that the twentieth century in England started with the publication of the casualty lists from the Battle of the Somme. Certainly the major explosions of World War I in the English literary imagination were deferred for at least a decade. One has only to compare the best "war poems" of, say, Owen and Sassoon with *Parade's End* or *Goodbye to All That* to see that the rhetoric of "realism" pervading the former was composed of essentially Victorian gestures. For Yeats, the war remained a scene for individual heroism wherein a young man's "lonely impulse of delight" might intersect the line of desperate objective history. In all the Georgian poets, we get a sense of numbness and shock that deadened the spirit of formal invention; it was almost as if the new horrors of trench warfare had to be set down in literature while there was yet time, and in the only forms and attitudes at hand. In reportage and fiction, there was at least a chance for the gap between literary conventions and new modes of experiencing that most traditional theme of the poet and lover at arms to become a kind of subjective matter of its own. Among the poets, Wilfred Owen, in "The Show," manages to accomplish some remarkable things, but elsewhere, too often, he can only muse on "the old Lie" of *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*

But there are more ironies to history than that, and it perhaps needed an age which followed the creation of a new kind of metamorphic poetry by Eliot, Hart Crane and Pound to allow a poet to deal with World War I in a sufficiently intense way. By 1937, when David Jones' remarkable *In Parenthesis* finally appeared, there were already too many other things for poetry to be about: the Slough of Despond of *The Waste Land* had already yielded to the thunders of Auden's Europe, and a pure reaction, undiluted by a sense of intervening time, to the first war would seem to have been impossible. But the grotesque timing was indubitably necessary, for by 1928, when Jones started his book, Eliot's poem had already had its repercussions, and even though he appears not to have read Joyce or Pound, one certainly feels in the form of *In Parenthesis* a response to the demands of a new age.

The book's genre is neither, strictly speaking, lyric nor narrative. It is in a mixture of prose and free verse, by no means so startling in its shifts of form, tone and voice as Auden's *The Orators,* for example, and groping always toward a style that can synthesize the epic and

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the colloquial. An infantry unit in the trenches about twenty kilometers south of Ypres marches, tarries, fights and suffers, and the language in which their life is described seeks to grasp the apocalypse of the mundane, as well as to collate timeless, frozen moments of history. The overall method of the book is palimpsestic in a manner not unrecognizably like parts of *The Cantos*: there is constant reference to Arthurian romance, to Mallory, to the English Bible and to *King Henry V* of Shakespeare. The historical ironies of the war to end wars, and of the impossibility of heroism in single conflict and the minuteness of the total area of terrain involved in marches and retreats, are pointed up by the additional force brought to the experience by a poet of a minority culture. Jones feels only too keenly how desperately England looked to the Wales it had subdued to provide a British epic hero. His repeated interpolation of material from Mallory, and his adaptation of Mallory's prose style constantly reminds us that the English recension of Welsh materials was a kind of continuous process in the development of the English poetic imagination. An additional spiritual disturbance in the narrator's voice is provided by Jones' Catholicism (he is a convert) with its relevance for him to the medieval allegorical tradition. It is clear, however that the method of the book is far from allegory. The historical juxtaposition of already allegorized romance material and the most naturalistic of fictional impulses leads to what are not at all like the (after all) seedy ironies of *The Waste Land*, in that when past and present are confronted, neither one nor the other is intended to suffer from the comparison. Jones is fascinated in a very Welsh way with the magic of language itself, and parts of the book become almost litanies of the colloquial—lists, celebrations, comments and explanations of the slang of the trenches. He has glossed the book heavily with notes, and while they seem to reflect something of the famous Eliot notes, they have the real function of relieving the whole book of what has become almost the traditional emblem of modern war writing, a kind of inside-dopester tone in the use of terms with which the reader is expected to be unfamiliar, but which he must learn to understand from their use in the book itself. Kipling is probably responsible for this, in the very tone of his explanations of what it's *really* like to be one of those deeply moving civil servants in India, and Hemingway undoubtedly learned this tone from him. It is completely and splendidly missing in Jones' book.

The frequent shiftings of syntax and ellipses in the prose ("Occasionally a rifle bullet raw snapt like tenuous hide whip by spiteful

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ostler handled") have caused some commentators to compare the style with Joyce. But this smacks only of the parts of *Ulysses* in which Joyce is using a kind of pre-English in a self-conscious and half-comic way. One can, for that matter, find resemblances to the *versets* of Perse in *Anabasis*: "Here funnels and mastheads could be seen. Here the influence of the sea and of the tackle and ways of its people fell upon them." There are bouts of dialogue, interior monologue, and a marvelous, long round of boasting, in the tradition of medieval epic in which one of the Welch Fusiliers wails out what is really more of a lament for the submergence of his culture in England's than anything else.

In Parenthesis is the kind of book which can have no results, in that its form and style are so outrageously personal that no other writer could learn much from Jones' use of them. But it is indeed a remarkable work in that it succeeds in uniting the intentions of the Georgian war poets with the power of later prose narratives. It manages to convey the essential violence of a whole category of experience, but without Expressionist distortion and at the same time to place that experience in a mythical perspective without slighting its actuality. It may be the best book about World War I in English.

John Hollander

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THE THEATRE AND THE "ABSURD"

THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD. By Martin Esslin. Doubleday Anchor Books. $1.45.

Is the world we live in "absurd?" And has it become so recently? And does our world, newly "absurd," require a particular kind of theatrical art expressing "absurdity?"

If you are ready to answer "yes," then you are likely to be convinced by what Martin Esslin says in his new book.

Esslin says that out present sense of "absurdity" springs from the loss of humanly important realities. Of what realities? Well, Esslin thinks we have lost God. I should like to know when this occurred. But Esslin probably means merely that we have lost a belief in God once natural to us. Now, I confess to having very little nostalgia for those periods of history when it was "natural" to believe in God. Was such belief ever really natural? Soren Kierkegaard, for one, thought that Christian education, "natural" in the nineteenth century—this kind of education we have lost—was the main obstacle to Christian belief; for Kierkegaard, true belief is always possible, always miraculous.

Is the family gone? At least it is better understood. Is the state gone? But the state seems to require the efforts and adherence of the young, and more than ever. Is patriotism gone? If so, is the loss grievous? Yet the figure of Colonel John Glenn, so much with us at this moment, suggests that patriotism still has no little virility. The cosmonaut, who orbited the earth three times and saw four settings of the sun in a few hours, came back to earth to inform us that he is still thrilled by the sight of the American flag. Did he then go up into weightless space just for the sake of a fractious parcel of humanity confined to United States territory in the Western Hemisphere? If so, his exploit must frighten us, much as it thrills us. What a man can do so well, he still does not do for men. The world is not so different from what it was.

Is reason gone? Then who would infer anything from our loss of it? To say that reason is gone is to speak without any hope of being understood. An "absurd" world would be silent; it would not be peopled with plays.

Esslin makes much of another loss: that of our formerly felt intimacy with the world. And in support, he quotes from Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of

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light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity.

I think it is absurd to take anyone—even Camus—for an authority on the "absurd." And, in fact, the quotation above, which Esslin has used to buttress his view, is fairly close to nonsense. Imagine: Camus prefers a world that can be explained by faulty reasoning—but why then use the term "explained?"—to one inexplicable by good reasoning. He wants the world to be familiar; Aristotle thought it should excite wonder. And how could the world ever be deprived of illusion, which is so large a part of it? Camus himself had plenty of illusions, one of them being that we are bound to have a feeling of absurdity if denied the memory of "a lost homeland" and of "a promised land to come." Is it absurd not to have had a good background or to be without real prospects? Sad, perhaps; but it is one thing to call the world sad, quite another to call it "absurd." The first statement is without philosophical pretension.

The world can no more become "absurd" than it can sin, starve, or fall down. There are many absurdities in the world; most of them were always there.

But was there always a Theatre of the Absurd? I claim there was not and that there is no such thing now. Esslin claims that (1) there was a Theatre of the Absurd in the past and (2) the group of contemporary dramatists whom he has singled out write the kinds of plays they do in response to a particular crisis the world is going through at this time. But the two claims refute each other. Esslin maintains that there is a particular spiritual crisis, and that a certain kind of dramatic art has been produced in order to express it; but he cannot maintain, then, that forms of theatre like those being produced now long antedated the crisis. Yet in a chapter entitled "The Tradition of the Absurd," Esslin ranges through past history for prototypes of the new kinds of plays now being written. The mimes of the Middle Ages, the court jesters, the clowns of Shakespeare, the harlequinades which entered into the British music hall and American vaudeville, the Commedia dell'Arte, the nonsense verse of Lear and Lewis Carroll are all called on to account for the character of specifically modern works, which character, in turn, is supposed to be due to a special contemporary predicament. Esslin writes: "This is not the place for a detailed study of Shakespearean clowns, fools, and ruffians as forerunners of the Theatre of the Absurd." No, it is not.

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But let us consider Esslin's main contention that there is a Theatre of the Absurd at this time, quite apart from his other contention that it pre-existed its own *raison d'etre*. Is it true that Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet, Albee, Arrabal, Grass, Pinter, and Simpson can be best understood if considered as instigators of a new theatrical art, the Theatre of the Absurd? Some of the playwrights listed above have, to be sure, written plays to Esslin's specifications, but only one of these, Ionesco, is really important. The three major figures, as I am sure Esslin himself would agree, are Ionesco, Beckett, and Genet. But of these three, only Ionesco fits Esslin's formula.

One individual, to be sure, if an artist of rank, has as much interest as a whole school. And Ionesco is a remarkable playwright with some five or six masterpieces to his credit. He has great invention and an exuberant humor; unfortunately, his ideas are topical, adventitious: the last thing one could say about them is that they are "new." One typically "new" idea of Ionesco's is that there are no new ideas, even in the construction of plays. Here he is quite wrong. He has written some plays that are really novel as structures. It is the ideas expressed in them that are all too familiar and which spring from the prevailing climate of political and metaphysical pessimism.

What is objectionable in Ionesco's theatre is curiously akin to what is objectionable in Esslin's whole concept. Ionesco thinks "absurdity" is something new*; Esslin wants to give us news of the "absurd."

Esslin talks a lot about Samuel Beckett and Jean Genet. But in the fairly detailed analyses he makes of their lives and work he is unable to illuminate much of their art or even to give us the feeling that he has judged it wisely.

Beckett he discusses under this rubric: "The Search for the Self." And Esslin searches accordingly in Richard Ellmann's biography of James Joyce (who knew Beckett) for such data as might throw light on *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. Now Ellmann's book is valuable on Beckett as well as on Joyce. For instance, it appears that Beckett is given to long silences and when he visited Joyce they often stared at each other for hours without uttering a word. Now this certainly tells us something about the kind of dialogue we have come to expect from Beckett. But what has the personal data about Beckett to do with a general cultural crisis, or with any modern feeling for "absurdity?"

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* I don't think Ionesco regards "absurdity" as an "idea," but as an "anti-idea." His theatre has been called "anti-theatre."

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Beckett is a very strange man, no question of that. Even his handwriting, of which I have seen one instance, is peculiar in the extreme.

Esslin finds fault with my own view, expressed in a piece I did on Beckett for *The New Leader*: "Samuel Beckett and James Joyce in *Endgame,*" and in which I attempted to explain Beckett's play in terms of his attitude to James Joyce. Esslin says that my theory "surely becomes untenable;" not because there may not be a certain amount of truth in it (every writer is bound to use elements of his own experience of life in his work) but because, far from illuminating the full content of a play like *Endgame,* such an interpretation reduces it to a trivial level." Did I reduce the relationship between Hamm and Clove to a trivial level? I made the point that the *value* of recognizing the autobiographical material in the play was that by so doing, it was possible to absolve the author of the charge of pessimism. But never mind my own interpretation of the play. Here is Esslin's: "The experience expressed in Beckett's plays (including *Endgame*) is of a far more profound and fundamental nature than mere autobiography. They reveal his experience of temporality and evanescence; his sense of the tragic difficulty of becoming aware of one's own self in the merciless process of renovation and destruction that occurs with change in time; of the difficulty of communication between human beings; of the unending quest for reality in a world in which everything is uncertain and the borderline between dream and reality is ever shifting: of the tragic nature of all love relationships and the self-deception of friendship . . . and so on." Are Beckett's plays about all that? From this list of abstractions one would think that Beckett's plays had been written in the German language and not, exquisitely, in the French. Besides, what have Esslin's list of abstractions to do with the life of Samuel Beckett? And what has that life to do with a general cultural crisis? These are the connections Esslin is obliged to establish, and he does not.

On the subject of Genet, too, Esslin's concept of the "absurd" is little help. He turns to the data about Genet's life which we have from the playwright himself. It seems that Genet was abandoned as a child, and when accused of stealing, resolved to become a thief. Between 1930 and 1940, as Esslin notes, Genet led the life of an itinerant delinquent, among beggars and pimps; he made acquaintance with the French jails. Fortunately for the theatre, he never quite became "the hardened jail-bird on whom the prison gates shut forever."*

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* Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*

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These facts show Genet to be a very strange person, too. Should not his personal strangeness be related to his plays? But Esslin, out to prove his theory, disregards the personal facts and concentrates on the "absurdity of our historical epoch." He derives Genet's plays from the modern feeling of helplessness in facing a mechanized world. Esslin writes: "A feeling of helplessness when confronted with the vast intricacy of the modern world, and the individual's impotence in making his own influence felt on that intricate and mysterious machinery, pervades the consciousness of Western man today. A world that functions mysteriously outside our conscious control must appear absurd." Once again Esslin has trotted out fashionable and very misleading clichés. The world Genet describes in his plays is the product of a virile imagination, almost Elizabethan in its force and fancy. Genet could be compared to Marlowe, never to Kafka.

Art, it must be admitted, is unable to occupy a central position in the modern world; thus, the artist cannot be in the very center of things. But Homer was certainly in the very center of things Greek when he wrote the *Iliad,* though he wrote it in Ionia; and Sophocles was in the center of the Greek world when he wrote plays for the Athenian public. In the modern world, of course, no such priviliged position is open to art. To look at all, the artist is probably condemned not to look all around him. Can anyone be in the center of things in our age? This is not sure. But this is sure: anyone who is, will not be an artist. That is why a Homer is utterly inconceivable today. (Hegel notes that there was not a single tool made by the Greeks which went unremarked in Homer's *Iliad.* Is it conceivable that any modern poet could sum up in song all the instruments manufactured in our society? Besides, to carry Hegel's point further, every tool Homer described was already an art object.) Very probably art requires, if it is to be practiced at all today, that its creator contribute to it his own personal oddity. I suggest that this is a logical consequence of the marginal situation of art as such. Political criticism of art, even when sensitive and cultivated, has proved utterly sterile, and unable to instigate any sort of new creation. It was based on a fallacy: that politics was central (this is certainly to be questioned) and that being central, it had the right to insist that art be central, also; now two things cannot occupy the same place at the same time—perhaps they can if infinitely smaller than miniscule. But the political critics of modern art and literature were not thinking along the lines of quantum physics. They were thinking of the art produced in past epochs when art *was* central. In fact, the history of what we call modern art and modern literature has been the successive im-

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position on the public of bizarre standpoints, unexpected attitudes, peculiar effects. This has gone on for a fairly long time but it has only recently become a general trend in the theatre. Of course, Strindberg was as peculiar as Beckett or Genet; but he was more exceptional in the early part of this century. It is now to be expected that personally peculiar people will create the art which persons of sensibility are able to enjoy. Does this mean that a theatre created by "peculiar" persons should be called the Theatre of the Absurd?

I think the important point to make here is that this development in the theatre is belated, and follows some fifty or seventy years after personal oddity had vindicated itself in other fields—painting, poetry, and the novel—as essential to the production of authentic art. In fact, I would suggest that one reason good art has for so long a time been "advanced" art is that artists relished the freakishness attendant on being "ahead" of others. One way of being peculiar is to be in advance like the crane which, Lautréamont says, flying first, forces all the others to look at its behind.

But for the theatre—and Esslin does not see this at all—the need to be a bizarre, eccentric individual involves the creator in a dialectic, as it perhaps does not involve any other type of creator—painter, poet, or novelist. Admitted that it is an advantage if you want to create to be personally strange: still, in the theatre your personal strangeness has to have an immediate effect on an audience composed of very different persons, who have to react to the play presented before they have had a chance to be converted to it by the intimidating force of cultural opinion. I do not think the dialectic I have indicated should come to an end. I think it is this dialectic which has made the plays of both Beckett and Genet more available to us than their novels were. If Beckett had not turned to the theatre, he would have remained the eccentric writer of morbid tales in monotonous, if good, prose. If Genet had not turned to the play form, he would have remained a writer of lyrical pornography. The dialectic imposed by the theatre has made it possible for these "strangers" to speak in a language pleasing both to them and to us. It is this dialectic which makes the new plays more interesting to me, at least, than the new poems or novels. Of all modern works it is the new theatre pieces which are, and have to be, I suggest, the least "absurd."

Lionel Abel

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DEMONS AND DREAMS

THE SLAVE. By Isaac Bashevis Singer. Translated from the Yiddish by the author and Cecil Hemley. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $4.95.

The typical modern novel is "psychological" in that the world it presents is really a projection, a bodying forth of the self (or selves) whose analysis constitutes the subject of the novel. One feels the novelist does not really believe in the world in which he has ostensibly situated his characters, because we observe that his characters do not believe in it: the self-absorption of the characters in modern fiction devours both themselves and their world. The relations between self and world are variously but quite regularly defined as boredom, disgust, contempt, frustration, nostalgia. The world in such novels is not really "there" in the same sense that the characters are "there." Sometimes, as in the stories and novels of Kafka, the tales of Borges, and the newest French fiction, not even the characters are "there;" the arena of the novel has been preempted by the agony of disembodied emotional and intellectual struggles. The farthest reach of the post-classical novel in both its bias toward psychologizing and its verbal inventiveness is identical: it is an empty stage, an infinite enumeration, an indefinitely repeated gesture or cry. The purest form of the post-classical novel is the nightmare.

It is I think altogether to the credit of Isaac Bashevis Singer that his fiction provides modern taste with a generous ration of nightmare, in the form of demons, dreams, deformity, and disease—without sacrificing the centrality of plot or the substantiality of a world. In the age of post-classical fiction, Singer continues to practice the classical virtues. His rare gift for constructing inventive and compelling plots has been much remarked on by critics. What has not been sufficiently commended, however, is his extraordinary power of sensuous evocation. Every page of Singer's fiction is crowded with physical objects—phylacteries and prayer books, handkerchiefs and dogs, dunes and trees, chandeliers and fiddles, lemonade and knives, sleighs and garlic, beards and mice. These things are brought to life for the reader not by being described individually, but simply in their marvelous abundance and rightness of juxtaposition. They are neither accessories in a psychological drama, nor props to make credible a world. In most of his stories, objects are at the very center of the stage, actors in the dialectic between the material world and the spiritual forces, principally demonic, which invade it. There is no need for Singer to describe: objects are there, charged, over-charged, with the tension between their employment as

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instruments of righteousness and as vessels of demonry.

Singer does not face the typical problem of the modern writer—of having to improvise a milieu and make it credible to his readers, or of having to take a familiar (or potentially familiar) milieu and make it exotic to his readers. This is not because of anything inherently more plausible, or answerable to his readers' experience, in the world he presents; but simply because of the unfailing assurance and lack of apologetic distance with which he moves in it. It is an utterly bounded, though not a limited world: that of Eastern European, particularly Polish, Jewry, with its whole complex history from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century of Cabbalistic mysticism and magic, Cossack persecution and massacre, the Sabbatian heresy, Hassidism, and the translation under the pressure of the Enlightenment of the religious ideals of study and pious unworldliness into the secular ideal of the scholar-intellectual. On the face of this highly local and historically dense environment, Singer inscribes the universal conflicts of reason versus the flesh, and of creedal and ritual religion versus a free spirituality. Entirely absent from his work is any merely historical motive, the impulse to evoke this world and thereby to preserve it simply because it is both past and mercilessly destroyed. There is no nostalgia and no pathos, because there is no distance. Singer's fiction is intimate, meticulous, laconic, and unsentimental. At times he reminds one of Babel—except he is more spacious, less ambiguous and troubled in tone.

Singer's characters are typically beset by motives whose clarity and forcefulness confound the hesitations of our modern psychological sophistication. They are wholly conscious motives, that can be ranked on the traditional schedule of virtues and vices. Lust, envy, gluttony, pride, and avarice predominate among the vices; pity, simplicity, and humility among the virtues. (Singer's accounts of gluttony include some of the most stunning descriptions of the pleasures of eating since the *Iliad*.) He brilliantly executes this pre-modern account of motivation, which includes a self-understanding of character as a drama of contending supernatural forces. Of necessity, these are not characters in the modern, infinitely expandable, individual sense, but creatures of a vigorously collective psychology. Singer presents an image of Jewry not in terms of individuals struggling in an alien setting—the familiar image of the Jew from Shylock to Swann—but in terms of a rigorously bounded, sensuous community of physical things and almost palpable beliefs and avoidances. It is a world whose moving principle is appetite, whether the appetite for learning and salvation or for warm flesh and succulent foods and fine clothes and furnishings, and in this respect

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most deeply removed from the world of modern fiction, whose principal subject is the failure of appetite and passionate feeling.

In the treatment of his recurrent theme of the temptation of demonry, the strength of Singer's fiction lies in his exploration of the demonic not as a function of individual aberration but as the aberration of a community. The Jewry of which he writes is saturated with magical superstition, and convulsed by the inexplicable sorrows of persecution and the exhaltations and hysterias of Messianic hope. It is an era magnetized by the mystery of transgression—enthralling as a subject of fiction and of great interest also as a crucial, but largely suppressed, chapter in Western religious history which reached its climax in the seventeenth century, the century in which Lurianic Cabbalism, with its indeterminate borderline between mysticism and magic, was the dominant spiritual influence throughout the Jewish Diaspora.

Usually in Singer's fiction, the devil has the last word, and his human characters do not survive the paradoxes of their humanity. However, in Singer's latest novel, *The Slave,* as the author himself is reported to have said, for a change God has the last word. The novel is again set in Poland, over a period of twenty years following the Chmielnicki massacres, and traces the fortunes of a virtuous man both desperately encumbered and supremely graced by his own spiritual scruples, who struggles with physical bondage, prohibited love, the perverseness of oppression, and the coercions of his own oppressed community. Perhaps precisely because it is a study in goodness, *The Slave* differs from most of Singer's previous work in having a less hectic, less exotic atmosphere. The novel has a warmth, a wholesomeness which befits a work which dares to tell a passionate, exalted love story and to end with a large romantic gesture of reunion-in-death as tearfully satisfying and old-fashioned as the end of *Wuthering Heights.*

The demonic is more alien here, for the main representatives of superstition are the un-Christianized Polish peasants to whom the hero is sold as a slave, rather than the *shtetl* Jews. There is less dwelling on ethnic eccentricity, and more emphasis on the beauty and equanimity of nature. The tone also is more neutral, more classically "novelistic"—it is neither the chatty tone of the folk narrator of some of Singer's stories nor the ironic tone of the malicious spirit or demon who narrates others. The novel also has a greater inwardness of characterization, which follows on the fact that the two main characters are from the inception of the story separated off from their communities. The devout hero, Jacob, is twice alienated from the Jewish community from which he was torn by the Chmielnicki massacres: by solitude and the absence of his books during the period of his slavery, and by love for a Gentile woman,

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forbidden alike by Jewish and Polish law. The heroine, Wanda, is set apart from her brutish family and neighbors, first by her innate refinement and later by her love for Jacob, and then from the Jewish community in which she can live as Jacob's bride only by pretending to be mute. The novel recapitulates Singer's familiar themes—but at a certain remove, because the hero and heroine both transcend these conflicts. The way in which Jacob succumbs to but finally rejects the Sabbatian temptation, for instance, is only scantily described.

It cannot be denied that Singer has sacrificed a certain exotic intensity and sensuousness in the measured affirmations of *The Slave*. The sensuous charge of Singer's fiction does seem to have some inextricable connection with his vision of a universe in which the negative or demonic pole is the stronger. Let's assume, however, that the modern educated sensibility still has some appetite left for the climaxes of true love and noble death, alongside its appetite for the demonic and fantastic. This being the case, *The Slave* should not only renew our sense of the possibility of still writing good novels but also renew our capacities for emotional catharsis as distinct from the endless exacerbation of the emotions which most modern fiction provides.

Susan Sontag

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PAT HOBBY RIDES AGAIN

THE PAT HOBBY STORIES. By F. Scott Fitzgerald. Scribner's. $3.50.

There are seventeen stories in this book and the only reason that anyone will read them is because they are by F. Scott Fitzgerald. There is nothing wrong with publishing minor works only because they were written by a writer who was anything but minor, but in this case it seems disrespectful to have dug up these trivial pieces from 1940 and 1941 copies of *Esquire* and put them into book form. The pieces are uniformly flat, mechanical, and dull-humored, and as satirical comments on Hollywood they are not quite up to the level of *Boy Meets Girl*. They are nearly-forgotten one-reelers out of the past that would have been best remembered had they been left in the can.

Pat Hobby is a screenwriter on the skids, "down to his last thirty cents," "down to his last fourteen cents," down to "his second-to-last-dime." A not-too-well-preserved relic of the silent film era, he is "forty-nine, with red-rimmed eyes and a soft purr of whiskey on his breath." Fitzgerald was trying to portray a comic heel, but Pat comes off only as a sentimental, bungling con man who fails at blackmail, plagiarism, seduction, and just about everything else he tries and is not very funny in the process. He is desperate but not hard or clever enough to be a very effective heel; a Sammy Glick or even a Pal Joey would have laughed him right out of business. Unlike the schemers of Schulberg and O'Hara, Pat is a caricature who is constantly trying to put something over on other caricatures. The stories end with tricks that are slightly post-O. Henry, and no one story stands out from the rest. Part of the reason for all this is that Fitzgerald was just not a humorist; but there is certainly nothing wrong with not being a humorist, especially when you've written *The Great Gatsby*.

What makes the quality of these stories not only sad but so difficult to believe is that at the same time he was sending them off to New York he was also writing *The Last Tycoon*. The Pat Hobby stories were obviously not written for love and they may be proof of Fitzgerald's professionalism, but they also do a great deal to show what one major writer had to do in this country to be able to enjoy the luxury of writing a major novel. Today, then, we have a fine-looking edition of seventeen stories that are not even interesting commercially, as were so many of the earlier stories he did for *The Saturday Evening Post*, and six chapters of a novel that, completed, might have been an American classic. There may be more ways out for our writers now—

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they don't have to write for the mass media unless they want to strike it rich—but it is doubtful that any of these ways would have done a man like Fitzgerald any good; it isn't easy to picture him accepting handouts from foundations or teaching creative writing at Bard.

Arnold Gingrich, the publisher of *Esquire,* has written an introduction to the book which sounds like the record of a man's dealings with his bank. He reminds us that Fitzgerald was broke during those last years and again and again quotes his urgent requests for money all for no purpose except possibly to point out that Gingrich and *Esquire* always come through when things get really tough. He dismisses the idea some people have that the stories are hack work because they are about a hack (he calls this idea a "pathetic fallacy") which he doesn't seem to realize is an insult to Fitzgerald's talent and puts Pat Hobby in the same class as Monroe Stahr, giving Pat back the seat he once had at the studio commissary's Big Table. But because two men sit at the same table does not necessarily put them in the same class. That makes *two* pathetic fallacies.

Gene Fowler, in his biography of John Barrymore, another artist who didn't belong in Hollywood and who died the wrong way, quotes the critic Ashton Stevens on Barrymore's appearance in the potboiler farce *My Dear Children*: " 'Cynics . . . came to sneer, but presently wore friendly smiles; for, what was left of the most fascinating actor of his day still held some of the old magnetism. Quicksilver would gleam again in strange moments of this strange impersonation of a lightweight father in a lightweight comedy, wherein Hamlet became not only Prince Hal but Falstaff too.' " These stories were written for the same reason Barrymore appeared on that stage and although they have none of Fitzgerald's old magnetism or even gleams of quicksilver it doesn't really matter that much because all of his finest writing is in print and is always there for us to go back to after parting company with Pat Hobby.

Wilson Pollock

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FICTION CHRONICLE

THE FOX IN THE ATTIC. By Richard Hughes. Harper. $4.50.
THE END OF THE BATTLE. By Evelyn Waugh. Little, Brown. $4.50.
THE MIGHTY AND THEIR FALL. By Ivy Compton-Burnett. Simon and Schuster. $4.50.
ISLAND. By Aldous Huxley. Harper. $4.00.
BORDER COUNTRY. By Raymond Williams. Horizon. $4.50.
KEY TO THE DOOR. By Alan Sillitoe. Knopf. $5.95.

Class—how it conditions morality and even how it binds or dissolves national communities—continues to preoccupy English novelists; the more serious and ambitious they feel, the franker their expressions on this topic. The first three novels in the list above are all by very senior writers, and they all watch the world from the privileged point of view afforded by superior birth and education. Mr. Huxley, who used to do so, does so no longer; but he has abandoned both England and fiction, and so is not a genuine exception. Mr. Williams and Mr. Sillitoe in their very different ways speak as men who achieved literacy without the advantages of wealth, but admit that humble origins affect one's way of looking, so that their books about Life are also books about Class. Class, indeed, might seem to be as crippling a self-imposed limitation on English writers as Intelligence is on French; but the truth is that it is less of an impediment than might be supposed, especially since the generation of powerful myths expressive of the emotional force of the topic. For instance, class in actual life seems merely a more or less odious weapon in the universal struggle for prestige and money, but it does not feel like that to people who possess it; they like to think of it as belonging, like some ancestral sword, to a lost epoch when everybody knew his place and all the talk was of the obligations, not the privileges of nobility. History is a record of the decay of this happy arrangement, and to understand our present miseries one needs to study history in this light. And that is why there are at present in progress, or recently completed, so surprising a number of many-volumed novels by serious writers, all variously preoccupied with class and the history of England in this century. Powell in *The Music of Time,* Snow in *Strangers and Brothers,* Waugh in his now completed trilogy, all need history to explain the decline and rise of classes; and now Richard Hughes has published the first part of a three- or four-volume novel to be called *The Human Predicament,* assuming—and why not?—that a study of the English and German

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upper classes between the wars can add something to what we know of that subject.

Hughes says in a note that this is not a self-contained volume, but simply a length of novel which he decided to publish before the whole was finished, because he is such a slow writer. This characteristic is responsible also for the curious nature of his reputation; his has been for years a name more honored than spoken. He has written two other novels, *A High Wind in Jamaica* and *In Hazard,* the first over thirty and the second over twenty years old. These books are very distinguished, the second and less celebrated being the more completely achieved—it is an extraordinary and almost successful attempt to over-go Conrad on the hurricane at sea, and combines a striking immediacy of effect with the accomplishment of profounder purposes. As it seemed that these books would have no successor, *The Fox in the Attic* is an uncovenanted boon to modern English fiction.

In his earlier work this very elaborate writer cultivated, when it suited him, a sort of ingenuousness, a let-me-tell-you-this-tale approach. There are reminiscences of this in *The Fox in the Attic,* though it is a sober, heavily-built piece, ambitious of permanence and grandeur. But if the scope is Tolstoyan, the manner is often more like Pasternak's, and there are carefully inlaid emblematic elements. These, however, do not prevent Hughes from speaking directly and at length to his thesis, his explanation of the human predicament; and there are two whole chapters in this volume which make no fictive gestures at all, but simply set forth this explanation.

So far as it has gone, Hughes's novel focusses strongly on what may for convenience be called the *ancien régime,* its privileges, its obligations, its changing posture, and the differences between English and German *Junker.* His hero, a young man named Augustine, inhabits "eremitically" a great house in Southwest Wales; but after being unjustly suspected by the working classes of having had a part in the death of a poor child, Augustine goes to live for a while in Bavaria with his German cousins, witnessing the early days of Nazism. In the opening chapter, which is certainly a fine achievement, Augustine (still nameless) carries home the dead girl's body, which he has found while shooting on the sea-marsh, on "a warm wet windless afternoon. . . . In a sodden tangle of brambles the scent of a fox hung, too heavy today to rise or dissipate." The fox (which also makes an appearance in a dream-sequence of *In Hazard*) is thus associated with death and the wish for death. Augustine finds himself alone in the house with the stiffened body, no longer child but total cadaver: "If (which God

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forbid) he had put it on again it would have fitted." This superbly careful opening inaugurates the double-plot of image and idea; for the novel is "about" death anr selfhood.

Hughes's characters are "gentle" in an old complex sense—they can be placed, perhaps, by their loathing for even the best hotels, their slightly embarrassed dislike of the successful middle class. Augustine would, in his youth, like to break with the past, and finds it hard, for instance, to give orders to servants; but *noblesse oblige,* and "it's intolerable for the ruled themselves when the ruling class abdicates." Hughes has studied manners; the suggestion is that there are some social facts which no political upheaval can alter, just as the Freudian abolition of conscience does not save a beloved child from suffering bad dreams. After the two chapters of sermon, we move to the German house, where aristocracy, while much more closely united with religion, is inconceivable save in its military incarnation; where there is a kind of gentle brutality in the treatment of children, and a fierce sense of race. But in both countries there has grown up a separateness between people, a failure of the ego to merge its limits in other persons. The war itself was the world's revenge on these separated egos; hate poured in through the gaps left by love.

The Fox in the Attic is a very big, very systematic book, though it is not wonderfully good sport for those who like novels to be puzzles; Hughes is as open as he can be about a subject complex in itself and further complicated by disciplined feeling. Whether the disease of the social structure is correctly diagnosed as malignant egotism is a question to which the answer need be no simpler than the book; whether this is or isn't a magnificently good piece of a novel is an easier question, and the answer is, "it is."

Mr. Waugh's trilogy is now complete, ten years after the publication of the first volume. This last volume is called in its English edition *Unconditional Surrender*; the purpose of the change escapes me, for the original title is exactly the right one. After the second volume the author suggested that there might not be a third, but fortunately he has got round to it, and the result is that one can handle this work confidently (which seemed impossible before) as part of the *corpus* of this extremely professional, greatly gifted, and very original novelist. Guy Crouchback, whose story this is, is the somewhat effete scion of a great recusant family, born into the inheritance of Broome (for years "a solitary outpost of the faith") but childless, divorced, and living in Italy when the war starts. The resemblances to *Brideshead Revisited* are limited to the kind of family

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in question, and to the general theme—present, in various forms, almost throughout Waugh's work—of the Catholic gentry and aristocracy as garrison of England, that "most devoted child of the see of St. Peter;" the chivalrous defenders of Catholic faith and reason in difficult times, when hierarchy is threatened and most of their cousins apostate. The norm of conduct is a simple, un-clever gentlemanly piety; without the Faith this type is Tony Last in *A Handful of Dust*, within it the boring Brideshead or, in this sequence, the boring Uncle Peregrine; but it must be added that Guy's father, humbly confident in his charity, his abstinence, and his view that there are really only two kinds of people, his kind and everybody else, is present almost throughout as a representative of this peculiar *noblesse oblige*.

Guy greets the Russo-German alliance of 1939 with relief and joy; at last the enemy is plain in view, a man can take his place on the beleaguered battlements of civility and fight for his faith and his country. So he swears to do, on the tomb and sword of an English crusader-saint. After much difficulty he is commissioned in a proud regiment called The Halberdiers; the Army seems good to him, with its rigid subordination and tough gentlemanliness; "Regular soldiers were survivals of a happy civilization where differences of rank were exactly defined and frankly accepted." So, happier than ever before, he can afford to laugh from his club doorway at the "progressive novelists" trying to put out the fires of the London blitz. For a while, during his training, Crouchback is constantly diverted by brother officers and others. There is the well-known farce of Apthorpe, and also many examples of a favorite device of Waugh's, which is to make extraordinary, maniacal characters out of people who hold his own Catholic-aristocratic opinions in their extreme form; a similar technique makes of a comic figure, the ferocious Brigadier Ritchie-Hooke, a kind of archetype of the true Englishman-at-arms, crazily biffing away at the enemy whenever he can create even an illegal opportunity.

But things go wrong. Trimmer, a sham gentleman and a coward, is absurdly boosted by official propaganda for his heroism at a time of low morale, and becomes the popular notion of the war-hero. Ivor Claire, admirable dandy, horseman, quintessential England, escapes court martial for his behavior during the evacuation of Crete by the all-powerful aid of Mrs. Stitch. The figure who emerges as successful in that disaster (and that at the expense of a couple of expedient murders) is the writer and ex-corporal Ludovic, who saves Guy's life. Discussing the situation at the Crete beach-head, Guy and Ivor had decided that being a man of honor in this war was as awkward as

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formerly, when duelling was going, but not gone, out; it put you into a position in which you were neither understood nor respected. "In the next war, when we are quite democratic, I expect it will be quite honorable for officers to leave their men behind." Ivor, in fact, at once does so. At the end of the second volume, *Officers and Gentlemen,* Guy remembers that "hallucination" under the influence of which he began the war—the belief that all henceforward was plain, and a man's duty equally so. Now, "after less than two years' pilgrimage in a Holy Land of illusion," he is back in the modern world of deceit and faithlessness, his own country dishonored by the Russian alliance; and only an obscure personal honor to fight for.

At this point the new volume opens, and its first episode represents the final degradation of England; the unconditional surrender. By the King's order there was made a sword, not for an English crusader but for Stalingrad; and the people stand in an enormous line to inspect it where it is on show in Westminster Abbey, "hard by the shrine of Edward the Confessor and the sacring place of the Kings of England." All around Guy sees the total abasement and ugliness of England at war—universal treachery, false heroes, crafty American lootenants; his father's words, "quantitative judgments don't apply" no longer appear to apply. But in a world where Corporal Ludovic's *pensées* succeed, and in which, torn by guilt, he writes a great mad trashy novel called *The Death Wish*; where flying bombs hover over London, and British officers work uselessly with atheist partisans in Yugoslavia—even in that world there are movements of grace, as when Uncle Peregrine, without trying, brings Guy's errant wife to the Faith. Guy's total disillusion is not despair; he had merely misunderstood the way of a fallen world. Like Alastair Digby-Vane-Trumpington in *Put out more Flags,* he had supposed that "danger justified privilege," and that he could "accept hardships in recompense for having been selfish and lazy." A Jewish displaced person corrects him; the world is otherwise. In a word, it is Hooper's world (he was the base officer-fellow in *Brideshead*); in another, it is a world of derision in which the Faith survives precariously, though of course it must triumph. This trilogy has nearly a thousand pages, all written with that chaste precision with which Waugh catalogues truth and enormity alike. If Apthorpe is the funniest thing, and the evacuation of Crete the most splendidly sustained thing, there are nevertheless a dozen features to be remembered as possible only to a writer of very great talent. The autobiographical preliminaries in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* claim only a high competence; Waugh is in fact a

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novelist who has got into his books a whole self-subsistent vision. That this is to some implausible, to some repulsive, may matter only in the very long run; perhaps the aristocratic myth, however extreme and bizarre, corresponds to a society which, seen under this aspect, offers possibilities for what James called "saturation," which may be denied to those who see it as amorphous, lacking the formal restrictions of caste and religion.

With Miss Compton-Burnett we are still in the upper-class preserve, though she offers no historical explanation of its present condition, and speaks of a gentry lower both in status and in morality—a Mandevillian world in some ways, and not much concerned with social or religious obligations. But, as she recently remarked to me, "I think family life will always have its essence, you know." Her world is as much as Freud's patterned by the family system; her sexual entanglements work for the most part in the same context, as if there were no other families within range to facilitate exogamy; the conversation is inbred in the same way. Thus her plots tend to be tragic, her dialogue (and the books are conducted entirely in dialogue) comic. The last time I wrote about Miss Compton-Burnett in this journal I happened to remark that it is a convention of hers that "nothing goes without saying." In this new book, which has characters more ready than their predecessors to discuss the conventions by which they live, this point is obligingly taken up. Father observes that "when a thing goes without saying, we like the better to hear it said;" clever Egbert replies, "We can only say it does go without saying, Father," but all repeatedly and perfunctorily excuse their civilized and cruel candor in this way.

As to plot, this new book is one of Miss Compton-Burnett's less strenuous efforts; and I wonder whether there isn't a new though very faint modernity of tone creeping in (she believes that the kind of life she describes is only temporarily in abeyance, and that already more and more people are "joining" it). Also, there seems to be a good deal more non-dialogue than usual. But verbally this is Miss Compton-Burnett at her sharpest and funniest, the dialogue moving forward by exploiting in each remark unobvious logical and syntactical implications in the previous one. Sometimes this brings the tone very near that of the Wildean gag:

> "Wild horses would not drag the admission from me."
> "Wild horses never have much success," said Lavinia.
> "Their history is a record of failure."

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There are some fantastically protracted passages in which all the characters show their mastery of the dialect, after a study comparable in heartless dedication to their self-seeking in all other respects. The children possess it young; their control of it is indicated at the outset when eleven-year-old Hengist is cheeking his Grandma:

"Hengist, how often have I told you not to keep your hands in your pockets?"

"I have not counted, Grandma," said the latter, too politely to incur rebuke.

Miss Compton-Burnett's world is what it is, and has its occult relevance to everybody else's. I hope the half-truth that she is an acquired taste will not deter too many serious readers, because she is a rich and idiosyncratic contributor to English fiction in a period generally thought of as a lean one.

Thus far three senior novelists, all thinking in fiction, all in good form; what of the fourth master? Reviewers ought to watch their superlatives, but *Island,* it is reasonable to say, must be one of the worst novels ever written; there are Victorian fiction-tracts with exactly as much claim to serious attention, at any rate if one excludes the excellent little scene at the beginning of Huxley's book about corrupt lovemaking in a Charing Cross Road flat; ecstasy lit by neon signs, green for putrefaction, pink for passion. That passage recalls the considerable achievement of *Point Counter Point,* and reminds us that Huxley *studied* fiction, used his intelligence to compensate his lack of a natural bent. Yet as a novelist he was perhaps always more or less consciously lowering himself (Wyndham Lewis's rough handling of the opening page of *Point Counter Point* is apposite) and here he makes the easiest and most perfunctory gestures possible, without apology. *Island* invites, but then rejects, comparison with *Brave New World.* The *soma* which was once anathematized as a cheap escape from the ardors of reality is now essential to social health; as a result, Huxley's energizing disgust, which could be good for fiction if not for the soul, is lost. A utopia in which nearly everybody is sanely educated, happy and intelligent—*nice* they are, really—is useless to Huxley the artist.

Island is about a community, soon to be swept away by the mad greed of the rest of the world, in which there has grown up a way of life based on the perennial philosophy, hallucinogenic plants, practical hypnotherapy, maithuna (*coitus reservatus*) and other yogas which are taught at school. A life-battered Englishman with a bad sexual history

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is wrecked on the island, and is converted to its way of life, but not quickly enough to prevent his helping the Oil Interests to destroy it. There is a dreadful revivalist Ranee, to show that there is still fake mysticism around, and a cynical Indian called Mr. Bayu, last of the long line of Huxleyan *bons vivants* or Scogans. But most of the characters live without complexities, whether of irony or anything else, "making the best of the here and now," coping intelligently with birth and sex and death, with economics and visionary experience. The novel is an extended study of such a society, made up mostly of conversations, lectures, extracts from key educational books, and reports on mushroom-visions. This kind of society has to get along without art, since nobody is unhappy enough to make any, and the book reflects this state of affairs. It is a kind of sterile hybrid, bred of a volume of sermons and *She*. I have never felt free to join those who profess an easy contempt for this writer; anybody who can dispose of his amount of information does us a favor by showing how little we use our heads. And if he is essentially *philosophe* rather than novelist, that makes his good novels remarkable as testimony to what can be done by intelligence and information in the absence of original talent. But he has obviously lost interest in fiction. Much of *Island,* the sermonizing in fact, has great interest, and so have his recent essays. One may look forward to many more volumes from Huxley, but it is permissible to hope that this is his last novel.

Raymond Williams is around forty, but already a sage not without honor in his own country and elsewhere. This is his first novel, and it is about a topic very much on English minds, the relationship between young men who have been educated out of the working class and the old unchanged family circle. This immediately gives a false impression; there are plenty of skimpy and derivative books around just now which simply cash in on this fashionable theme, but this isn't one of them. Williams' book is a novel, fully *written*; slow and heavy in its movement, but rightly paying this price for profound feeling. A scholarship boy, now a university teacher, goes home to the Welsh border for his father's last illness. The pain and social mistrust of his visit, the slowly elaborated significance of the basic resemblances between father and son that have nothing to do with caste, call for a degree of honest contrivance and laborious construction; but this pays off because Williams generates the sense of a radical fineness of feeling, an understood love. This emotional truth had to be painfully researched, especially as the characters are rarely allowed to cross the great frontier between feeling and saying. The book flashes back

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to the big strike of 1926, and here, as in the rendering of character and landscape, sounds true. The detail of very good working class life, the intimacy with which the subordinate characters are represented, confirm the general impression of authenticity. Williams, I think characteristically, has not chosen a hard or sensational case; the father isn't, as he might well sometimes be, a placid ignoramus, but a figure of exceptional moral and physical strength, with a certain harshness of feeling reflected in his son. The instance is sufficiently unique, in short, to lift the book out of the class of diagrammatic thesis-novels; it has moderation and control, speaks in the true voice of educated feeling. In a way it is a Great Tradition novel (this is a way of describing rather than of praising it) and is, as I have said, a little heavy in the hand; but its way of treating matters which, given the ordinary dressing of sensation or sentiment, now win automatically a favorable press, is so impressive that it enhances one's contempt for the others, the ones that cash in on this problem.

Alan Sillitoe is of course the novelist of the Nottingham slums, and he writes about prole life far below the level of Williams' rural railwaymen. He has a facility in fiction Williams could not pretend to; but it seems that something has gone wrong. He began startlingly with the saturnalian harshness of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning,* and, naturally prolific, followed this with a failed allegory, *The General,* and the tough and skillful stories, *The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner.* Now he returns, in a long novel, to the Seatons and the Nottingham slums, the Depression. Sillitoe is an extraordinary hand at recording detail—the collapsing houses, the scrabbling in rubbish heaps, the crimes, quarrels, drunken weekends of the very poor; and perhaps he puts down what they say in the way they say it more accurately than anybody else. Brian Seaton grows up; remote wars in Abyssinia rumble offstage, and then the real war begins. After a forced marriage at eighteen, he finds himself in Malaya, tough and self-sufficient with the other servicemen and with his girl-friend Mimi. Long before he has begun to educate himself, and has a vague sympathy with Communism, which is none the less strong enough to prevent his firing on Malayan terrorists in an ambush. The later part of the book is set in Malaya, with interlarded reminiscences of Nottingham, which explain his views and his behavior. His key to the door is knowledge, books; he has broken free of a father he in some ways resembles, and become in his way free, extreme, independent, beyond his father's humiliation.

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All this is careful and elaborate; nothing with this kind of accuracy could fail to have value. But this book hasn't the skeleton to support its weight, and Mr. Sillitoe seems to be temporarily at a pause. *The General* showed he was no fabulist, and he can't go on reporting slum Nottingham. The next book should be very interesting; perhaps, though it is hard to see how this can happen, it will turn away from proletarian class-writing (the whole mood of the moment seems to make for class solidarity among writers) and consider some of the ways in which the behavior of the English is independent of class-conditioning, if there are any. There is also, as I have hinted, the rich topic of the modern *myths* of class: crudely, the lies we tell ourselves about it, as if there were no other way to speak. It is a question, with Sillitoe, of talent continuing to work without the goad of resentment.

Frank Kermode

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CORRESPONDENCE

Sirs,

Thank you for your good note. . . asking me to comment on "The Cold War and the Future of the West." I agree too deeply with what Robert Lowell and Mary McCarthy have written and you have published to wish to fog their words with my assent.

Robert Oppenheimer

Sirs,

What in Heaven's name does John Henry Raleigh mean by saying in the Spring issue of *PR*, that "Rousseau. . . could not bring himself to mention the four, or possibly five, children that he had by Therese le Vasseur"? He mentions them at length in Book VIII of his *Confessions,* confesses that he turned them over to a foundling hospital and explains (however unconvincingly) why he did so. Mr. Raleigh quotes Goethe also as saying that he could not bear to write his own autobiography: I know not where Goethe said this, but it is a grade-school fact that Goethe did, in *Dichtung und Wahrheit,* in fact write his autobiography. These errors seem to me sufficient comment on Mr. Raleigh's wild generalization that "No one has ever been able to tell the truth about himself"—a perfectly valueless dictum.

Newton Arvin

Sirs,

Mr. Arvin is of course absolutely and incontestably correct. In fact, it is even worse, in the case of Goethe. I had been relying on a college memory—without checking—that in the conversations with Eckermann Goethe had said that, in spite of *Dichtung und Wahrheit,* it was impossible to tell it all honestly. But the opposite is quite

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true. He told Eckermann—to the contrary—that he was well pleased with his story. I'm afraid that the assertion about Rousseau is similarly based on a long-time, unchecked, "reversed" memory.

But I will take issue with Mr. Arvin characterizing as a "wild generalization" my statement that no one has ever been able to tell the truth about himself. I think some of the force of my generalization was lost by some further statements I had originally made in the typescript of my review which were cut out because of limitations of space. I was asked to suggest some cuts, and did, but did not realize that one cut would follow two real factual errors. The missing sentences are (they follow the two errors):

Even when people "tell all," a la Frank Harris, they are boasting, which is another form of dishonesty. Or perhaps they are out for revenge, as was Samuel Butler, whose father, it is reported, was a man held in some regard by his fellow men. Even if all the facts are told, the question of tone arises. What tone does one take in writing about oneself?

It can't be done, I still affirm.

In scholarly sack cloth and ashes, penitentially,

John Henry Raleigh

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Praise for
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A. ALVAREZ, The Observer: "*Not* a book of translations; it is a magnificent collection of new poems by Robert Lowell, based on the work of 18 European poets. . . It is a work of the first importance both as a piece of literature in its own right and as a new development in that constantly expanding imaginative universe in which Lowell orbits. . . What binds the poems together remains unchanged: the distinctive, subtle, but now quite unmannered rhythms, the beautiful links of assonance and half-rhyme, and the richness of response to every situation. All these go to make up Lowell's personal idiom. And they make *Imitations* not only the most varied and moving book that this leader of mid-century poetry has yet produced, but also, oddly, one of the most original."

EDMUND WILSON, The New Yorker: "He [Robert Lowell] is, I think, the only recent American poet—if you don't count Eliot—who writes successfully in the language and cadence and rhyme of the resounding English tradition. In some way that I find it rather hard to define, he and W. H. Auden stand distinctly apart from the other contemporary poets. It is a matter of stature, I suppose. They are not playing a game or amusing themselves or trying to make an impression or occasionally giving expression to some more or less poignant emotion. They have higher and more serious ambitions and they also have big enough talents to achieve poetic careers on the old nineteenth-century scale. Lowell's recent book of translations, called *Imitations*, is, so far as I know, the only book of its kind in literature. I have always said that the best translations—the "Rubaiyat," for example—are those that depart most widely from the originals—that is, if the translator is himself a good poet; otherwise the result is fatal. Now, Lowell, who has used material from a variety of other writers, all the way from Homer to Pasternak, has produced a volume of verse which consists of variations on themes provided by these other poets and which is really an original sequence by Robert Lowell of Boston. It has, in general, it seems to me, been stupidly received. It is absurd to complain, for example, that he has not followed Baudelaire literally when he has made a point of explaining in his foreword that he has taken every possible liberty—has changed the order of stanzas, invented stanzas of his own, and contributed his own new images. He has also in many cases transmuted the whole tone and color of the poem which he has taken as a point of departure."

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